

Paul's Letter to the Colossians



Events Leading to the Writing of Paul's Letter to the Colossians Written From Rome
During Paul's First Imprisonment, c. A.D. 62

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the COLOSSIANS INTRODUCTION

1

1. Title. Like Paul's other epistles, this one probably bore no title originally, for it is a letter. The earliest extant manuscript has the simple title *Pros Kolossaeis* ("To [the] Colossians"), which doubtless was added by an early scribe when Paul's letters were collected and published as a unit. From ch. 1:2 it is obvious that such a title is correct.

2. Authorship. This epistle bears the names of Paul and Timothy as authors (ch. 1:1). However, repeated references in the letter show that it is really Paul writing (see chs. 2:1; 4:3, 4, 7, 8, 13, 18), in both his own name and that of his younger associate. The early church was unanimous in attributing the letter to Paul. Although the more extreme criticism of the 19th and early 20th centuries held that this book was not written by Paul, today scholars generally assign it to him. Concerning the date of writing see Vol. VI, pp. 105, 106.

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Col 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

3. Historical Setting. How or when or by whom the Colossian church was founded cannot be definitely known. Paul made Ephesus the headquarters of his missionary enterprises for about three years (Acts 20:31). His vigorous prosecution of evangelism during this time led Luke to declare, “All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). Even Demetrius affirmed that “almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people” (Acts 19:26) from paganism. Writing to the Corinthians toward the end of his sojourn in Ephesus and its environs, the apostle sent greetings from “the churches of Asia” (1 Cor. 16:19). This indicates that Roman Asia was his mission field at this time (cf. 2 Cor. 1:8; Rom. 16:5, where the correct reading is “Asia”). To the great seaport of Ephesus would flock visitors from all Asia, and Paul’s messages must have been scattered far and wide by the returning travelers (Acts 19:10). Perhaps in this way the two citizens of Colossae, Epaphras (Col. 4:12) and Philemon (Philemon 1; cf. Philemon 10, 11; Col. 4:9), heard the glad tidings of salvation. They, with others, may have taken the gospel back to their townspeople (see ch. 1:7).

Thus, although Paul himself may not have founded the Colossian church (see on ch. 2:1), he probably was, in a very real sense, its father. From this epistle it is clear that he held himself responsible for the spiritual condition of the Colossian Christians, and that he knew well their needs and the dangers in which they stood. This information was brought to him in Rome, apparently by Epaphras (see Col. 1:8; cf. Philemon 23), and afforded the immediate reason for his writing the epistle to them. The danger confronting the Colossian believers arose from false teachings that were spreading among them. The precise details of these teachings at Colossae cannot be ascertained. Some scholars have identified them as being of two different types, Judaizing and Gnostic. Unquestionably they contained Judaizing tendencies, and some of the false doctrines alluded to in this epistle are similar to those held by certain Gnostics in the 2d and 3d centuries.

However, in view of the very great uncertainty of the whole picture, it is probably safer to understand the false teaching at Colossae as a mixture of Judaism and some type of Oriental paganism (perhaps an early form of Gnosticism) rather than as two separate systems of teaching. Both Jewish apocalyptic literature and the Dead Sea scrolls show that such mixtures were not uncommon among the Jews of the time. The concept of the angels as organized into orders (see on Col. 1:16) is a familiar one in Jewish apocryphal literature. And as portrayed in Colossians it seems to be verging on the idea of emanations as found in later Gnostic writings (see Vol. VI, p. 56). The terms “mystery” (ch. 1:26, 27) and “knowledge” (ch. 2:3)—which Paul seems here to be taking out of the mouths of the false teachers and using in a Christian sense—appear in the Dead Sea scrolls almost as technical religious terms. These words certainly enjoyed such status in the pagan mysteries and in Gnosticism. The word “fulness” (Gr. *plērōma*; ch. 1:19), which, Paul declares, dwells in Christ, at least later was a standard Gnostic term for the emanations, the subsidiary intermediate beings who were thought to issue from God and mediate between Him and the world. How far these concepts had developed at Colossae it is impossible to say.

However, this much seems clear. The false teachers at Colossae were teaching the existence of angelic beings arranged in different orders, intermediate between God and the world, who acted as mediators for men, brought them salvation, and merited their worship. At the same time these teachers insisted on an extremely legalistic

ceremonialism, following the Jewish pattern, and emphasizing circumcision, taboos in matters of food and drink, and observance of festivals. Against such teachings Paul wrote the Colossian epistle.

The place of writing of this epistle was doubtless Rome and the time of writing about A.D. 62, during the time of Paul's first imprisonment (see Vol. VI, pp. 105, 106).

4. Theme. In the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul expresses himself strongly against the heresy prevalent in that church.

In Galatians and elsewhere he rebuts Judaism solely, but here his target is hybrid. Not only is Paul concerned to refute Judaizing legalism, he also must contend with certain pagan elements that sought to degrade or eclipse the office of Christ. Therefore he attacks the idea of angelic intermediaries as agents of creation and mediation. He declares that Christ is Creator and Mediator exclusively (ch. 1:16, 20). Christ is the "head" of both material and spiritual things (chs. 1:18; 2:19). There exists in Him no dualism. The same Jesus is over all (ch. 1:18). He sustains all things (v. 17). He is God (v. 15). In Him the "fulness" dwells (v. 19). He needs no subsidiaries, or emanations. Paul asserts that in Christ are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (ch. 2:3). The consummate, saving mystery is not some esoteric knowledge concerning the various orders of angels (see on ch. 1:16), but "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 27). Therefore he condemns the worship of angels, which the false teachers advocated, as a denial of Christ's perfection as sustainer and mediator (ch. 2:18, 19).

The apostle also deals with the moral results of these heresies. Too rigid asceticism and unbridled license are alike prohibited (chs. 2:16, 20, 21; 3:5, 8, 9). Both heresies claim sovereignty for the human will. This "will worship" is a false, or inverted, humility, and therefore reprehensible. All carnal indulgences (and the apostle's list is well-nigh exhaustive) are stringently condemned. Paul presents Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Head and Mediator and Emancipator of the church. In Christ, principle is substituted for ceremonial. Clearly, logically, vigorously, the apostle writes to his friends at Colossae, persuading them to turn from vain and vapid speculations to the reality of the gospel of Christ.

5. Outline.

- I. Introduction, 1:1–13.
 - A. Opening salutation, 1:1, 2.
 - B. Paul's thankfulness for the progress of the Colossians, 1:3–8.
 - C. Prayer for future advancement in knowledge and good works, 1:9–11.
 - D. Thanksgiving for the blessings of God, 1:12, 13.
- II. Doctrinal Section, 1:14 to 2:3.
 - A. The pre-eminence of Christ, 1:14–19.
 - B. The work of Christ, 1:20–22.
 - C. The ministry of Christ's undershepherd, Paul, 1:23 to 2:3.
- III. Didactic Section, 2:4–23.
 - A. Warning against error, 2:4–8.
 - B. Christ the solution of doctrinal problems, 2:9–23.
 - 1. Christ the fullness of God, 2:9.
 - 2. Christ the head of all principality and power, 2:10.
 - 3. Christ the medium and motive power of conversion, 2:11–13.
 - 4. Christ the end of the outmoded legalistic systems, 2:14–17.

5. Warnings against false philosophies and speculation, 2:18–23.
- IV. Hortatory Section, 3:1 to 4:6.
 - A. Dead to the world, the Christian lives for Christ alone, 3:1–4.
 - B. The passions of the flesh put away by the power of Christ, 3:5–11.
 - C. True Christlikeness developed by the Christian believer, 3:12–17.
 - D. Duties of social relationships, 3:18 to 4:1.
 1. Of wives and husbands, 3:18, 19.
 2. Of children and parents, 3:20, 21.
 3. Of slaves and masters, 3:22 to 4:1.
 - E. General instruction, 4:2–6.
- V. Conclusion, 4:7–18.
 - A. Personal explanations, 4:7–9.
 - B. Salutations and greetings, 4:10–18.

CHAPTER 1

1 *After salutation he thanketh God for their faith, 7 confirmeth the doctrine of Epaphras, 9 prayeth further for their increase in grace, 14 describeth the true Christ, 21 encourageth them to receive Jesus Christ, and commendeth his own ministry.*

1. Paul, an apostle. For the form of the introduction and for the meaning of the terms see on Rom. 1:1; cf. on Acts 1:2. Paul calls himself an apostle because he wishes to emphasize that he is the Lord's ambassador.

Will of God. See on Eph. 1:1.

Timotheus. Concerning Timothy see on Acts 16:1. Paul includes Timothy in his apostolic greeting in other of his epistles (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philemon 1).

2. Saints. Gr. *hagioi* (see on Rom. 1:7).

Faithful brethren. This phrase is in apposition with "saints." Paul commends the members of the Colossian church for their faithfulness, trustworthiness, and unswerving fidelity.

In Christ. See on Eph. 1:1.

Colosse. More commonly spelled Colossae, a town in Phrygia about 110 mi. east of the seaport Ephesus. In Paul's time Phrygia was attached to the Roman province of Asia. Colossae was situated on the banks of the river Lycus about 13 mi. (c. 21 km.) from Hierapolis and about 10 mi. (16 km.) from Laodicea. In previous centuries Colossae had occupied a position of considerable importance. Through it the army of Xerxes, the Persian, passed on its way to attack Greece. Xenophon calls it "an inhabited city, prosperous and large" (*Anabasis* i. 2. 6; Loeb ed., vol. 2, p. 253). But by NT times the population had shrunk to small proportions. For the origin of the church see p. 183.

Grace ... and peace. See on Rom. 1:7; 3:24.

God our Father. See on Rom. 1:7.

Lord Jesus Christ. Important textual evidence may be cited (cf. p. 10) for the omission of these words. They were apparently added from the parallel passage in Eph. 1:2.

3. We give thanks. Compare on Eph. 1:16. The cause for this thankfulness is stated in Col. 1:4, 5.

God and the Father. Or, “God, even the Father.” Important textual evidence may be cited (cf. p. 10) for the omission of the word “and.”

Lord Jesus Christ. See on Eph. 1:17.

4. We heard. News of conditions in the church at Colossae was brought by Epaphras (vs. 7, 8).

Faith. Faith in Christ is not simply confidence and trust in Him as a person; it is complete subordination to the will of God and unquestioning reliance in His program. It is man’s acceptance of God’s way.

In Christ Jesus. Paul pictures Christ as the sphere in which the Christian lives, in the same way as the air is the medium in which his body exists. The one who is “in Christ” is bounded and circumscribed by his Saviour’s principles and laws; he lives by them and in them. Jesus is the source and the protector of his life. Within this circle that embraces everything for which Jesus stands as the Christ of God, true faith operates (see Eph. 1:15; 1 Tim. 3:13; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:15).

Love. Gr. *agapē* (see on 1 Cor. 13:1). Actuated by the principle of love to God and love for the brethren, all Christians will blend together. This attitude results in affection for all saints. Genuine faith toward God can produce nothing less. Paul is overjoyed at the developing Christian experience of the Colossian believers.

5. Hope. See on Rom. 8:24; 12:12. Paul now comes to the third in his triad of Christian virtues. Faith and love not only have their impelling power in hope, but this hope is their goal. The Colossians had listened to the story of redemption, and hope had been born in their hearts. This hope was the driving force in all their Christian experiences and philosophy of life. Thus hope precedes faith. It was because God had already devised the plan of salvation that hope was possible for fallen man.

In heaven. The Christian hopes for an “inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven” for him (1 Peter 1:4; cf. Phil. 3:21). Hope in the ultimate realization of God’s purpose for a sinless, harmonious universe was the fruitful soil from which sprang the faith and love that the Colossian believers had manifested.

Whereof ye heard before. Paul is reminding the believers of their joy and enthusiasm at the time the gospel message first reached them. He wishes the Colossians to contrast the faith they then had, and the joy that flooded their souls, with the doubts and unsettling tendencies resulting from the messages presented by the false teachers (cf. v. 23; ch. 2:6–8, 16–23).

Word of the truth. That is, the message that contains the truth, the good news of all the revealed will of God (see on John 8:32). Truth is a revelation of the mind of God and deals with ultimate and eternal realities.

Of the gospel. See on Mark 1:1. This phrase may be understood as in apposition with “of the truth.” It is closely connected with the clause that follows.

6. Which is come unto you. In the Greek it is clear that “which” can refer only to “gospel.” Compare v. 23.

In all the world. See on v. 23.

Bringeth forth fruit. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the addition of the words “and increaseth.” A tree produces fruit because it lives and is flourishing. So the Christian continually produces the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) because the life of Christ is a vital principle within him (see Mark 4:20, 28; Rom. 7:4, 5; Phil. 4:17). The force of Paul’s expression is that wherever the gospel is preached, it constantly brings forth fruit.

Also in you. Paul turns from the general truth that the gospel invariably produces fruit wherever it is proclaimed, to the particular fact that it has done this very thing in Colossae. This church is, therefore, linked with the universal purpose of God for the redemption of men.

The day. For the manner in which the gospel came to Colossae see p. 183.

Knew. Gr. *epiginōskō*, “to recognize,” “to know fully,” “to know by experience.” The verb form should be translated “came to know fully.” This full knowledge comes only by experience, hence only to those who accept the grace of Christ. The true knowledge of God is inseparable from the grace of God.

Grace. See on Rom. 3:24.

In truth. That is, truly. Paul is constantly making subtle contrasts with the false teachings he is about to mention.

7. Epaphras. Perhaps the messenger who had brought the message of salvation to Colossae (see p. 183). Paul here calls him “our dear fellowservant.” Writing to Philemon, he speaks of him as a “fellowprisoner” (Philemon 23). Epaphras was evidently a native of Colossae (Col. 4:12). It is conjectured that he may have heard the gospel in Ephesus, and that having consecrated himself to the service of God, he became a missionary to his own people.

For you. Textual evidence is divided (cf. p. 10) between this and the reading “for us.” The pronouns translated “us” and “you” are similar in the Greek (*humōn* and *hēmōn*) and are easily confused. Either reading is possible in the context.

Faithful. Paul here endorses the messages and labors of Epaphras.

Minister. Gr. *diakonos* (see on Eph. 6:21).

8. Who also declared. Epaphras had brought Paul news of the condition of the church at Colossae.

In the Spirit. Literally, “in spirit [or, “Spirit”].” It is not certain whether Paul means the Holy Spirit, or whether he has reference to the human spirit. All true love is the product of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life, but Paul may here be emphasizing the loving, dispositional response to the conditions in life, which each Christian should manifest.

9. For this cause. That is, in view of what has been said in vs. 4–8, Paul has recalled the faith of the Colossian believers in Christ, the genuineness of their love for the brethren, and their sustained hope in the heavenly reward. All of these things have gladdened his heart. The immediate cause of his rejoicing is the good word that Epaphras has brought from Colossae. His glowing report has warmed the heart of the aged Paul.

The day we heard. The arrival of Epaphras was a memorable day for Paul. From it he dates his intensified devotion and gratitude.

Do not cease to pray. Paul has already called attention to his prayers for the Colossian believers (see v. 3). The story from Colossae that Epaphras has brought him enables him now to pray with added meaning and joy. The phrase “do not cease to pray” means that Paul habitually prayed for the Colossian Christians. At no time could it be said that he had ceased to pray for them.

To desire. Paul was thankful, but at the same time solicitous. Not satisfied with the progress the Colossian believers had already gained, he yearned that further advancement might be made.

Knowledge. Gr. *epignōsis*, “full, precise knowledge” (see on Rom. 3:20; Eph. 1:17; cf. on Col. 1:6).

His will. Specifically a knowledge of God’s will concerning their conduct (see v. 10), more generally an understanding of the sum total of God’s all-embracing purpose. To the one who possesses such knowledge, each detail of life, with its problems and inexplicable mysteries, takes on new meaning. The Christian realizes that God has a plan for his life, and his aim is to fulfill the divine purpose.

Wisdom. Gr. *sophia*. See on Luke 2:52. Wisdom is the ability to apply the facts of knowledge to the situations of life. Unfortunately, it does not always follow that the one who has knowledge also possesses wisdom. For this reason Paul prays that the believers at Colossae might be endued with Heaven’s wisdom.

Spiritual. The adjective applies to the preceding noun, “wisdom,” as well as to “understanding.”

Understanding. The understanding given by the Spirit is that discernment which enables a Christian to judge between right and wrong. The temptations and snares of the adversary are recognized by the one enlightened by the Holy Spirit. And, if the entire will is surrendered to God and absorbed in the things of eternal value, the Christian chooses to do only those things that God would have him do.

10. Walk. Gr. *peripateō*, “to walk around,” metaphorically, “to live” (see on Eph. 2:2). The purpose of experimental knowledge of heavenly truths and of wisdom and spiritual understanding of right and wrong in relationship to God’s overruling purpose is to produce, as the result, a walk, or manner of life, that is becoming to a child of God.

Unto all pleasing. The standard of Christian conduct is the will of God; the purpose is that we might please Him all our days. We are created for His pleasure. We are redeemed that His original design may be completed. What displeases Him is sin. Speaking of His relationship to His heavenly Father, Jesus said, “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29).

Being fruitful. The fruitfulness of a tree is the result of life within. Fruit proves the existence of life. Fruit bearing does not enable the tree to live; the tree bears fruit because it lives. So the apostle illustrates the result of the living presence of Christ within the heart. A Christian walk resulting from this union of the divine and the human cannot but produce fruit (see Gal. 5:22, 23; cf. 2 Peter 1:8).

In every good work. The rounded completeness of Christian character is here emphasized. Christ does not wish halfhearted or unbalanced followers. Harmonious development of the whole of man is the ideal He sets before us. Compare Eph. 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:23.

Increasing. Side by side with advancement in witnessing by word and act, there must be a gradual deepening of spiritual discernment and knowledge. The apprehension of truth is progressive. The follower of Christ should be able to look back and see that he has made marked progress, and forward to see that there are new heights to achieve.

Knowledge. Gr. *epignōsis* (see on v. 9).

11. Strengthened with all might. Compare Eph. 1:19. Divine power enables man to meet every problem in his daily life, whether it arises out of his dealings with his fellows or from direct conflict with satanic agencies. Paul desires that the Colossian believers should receive this inner strengthening through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit,

which would show itself in mighty deeds for their Lord. As the need increased, they could draw adequate strength to meet it.

According to his glorious power. Literally, “according to the power of His glory.” The standard, or norm, by which this gift of heavenly might is granted to humanity is God’s power and resourcefulness and not man’s need. For the meaning of “glory” see on Rom. 3:23.

Patience. Gr. *hupomonē*. See on Rom. 2:7.

Longsuffering. Gr. *makrothumia* (see on Col. 3:12; cf. on 1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 6:6). When God’s power works in the soul, forbearance and tolerance control the passions. The child of God watches his Lord and Master patiently working out His designs, and he learns patience too. And so there grows in his heart endurance, steadfastness in meeting obstacles, and peace in facing even death. Patience is the opposite of despondency or cowardice, whereas long-suffering is the opposite of wrath or revenge. Patience is closely allied to hope (see 1 Thess. 1:3), and long-suffering is often connected with mercy (see Ex. 34:6).

Joyfulness. Or, “joy” (cf. on Rom. 14:17).

12. Giving thanks. A thankful heart is the mark of one whose positive emphasis day by day is in the direction of grateful conformity with the will of the great Giver (cf. Eph. 5:4; Phil. 4:6; Col. 2:7; 3:17; 4:2; see on Eph. 5:20). A lack of grateful appreciation stands at the root of rebellion and anarchy (Rom. 1:21). Heartfelt and grateful thanksgiving is a daily prerequisite to growth in the Christian life. This giving of thanks not only consists of the acknowledgment that God sends daily recurring bounties; it is also a worshipful ascription to Him of the honor due to His holy name and mighty power.

Unto the Father. Verses 12, 13 represent the Father as the One who inaugurated the plan of salvation. He is the One who gave His only Son.

Made us meet. Literally, “made us sufficient,” that is, qualified us. Textual evidence is divided (cf. p. 10) between the reading “us” and “you.” “Us” is attested in v. 13. This qualification, or fitness, is not earned by man. It is granted to those who by faith accept the Lord Jesus Christ (see on Eph. 2:8).

To be partakers of the inheritance. Literally, “for a portion of the lot.” See on Rom. 8:17.

Saints. See on Rom. 1:7.

Light. The word here stands in contrast with “darkness” (v. 13). “In light” is therefore equivalent to “the kingdom of his dear Son” (v. 13). See on John 1:5; 1 John 1:5.

13. Delivered. Gr. *rhōmai*, “to draw off,” “to rescue.” This is the word used by Paul in Rom. 7:24 in his anguished cry, “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” The “Deliverer” to come out of Zion (Rom. 11:26) is *ho rhōmenos*, “the rescuer.” In the present passage the Father is presented as the One who rescues men from the thralldom of Satan.

Power. Gr. *exousia*, “authority.” From the evil realm where the prince of darkness presides as merciless tyrant, the Divine Conqueror has rescued His saints. No longer are they subject to usurped authority.

Darkness. Note the contrast with “inheritance ... in light” (v. 12). From the authority of the prince of darkness the child of God is transferred into the realm of light.

Hath translated. Gr. *methistēmi*, “to transport,” “to remove.” Compare the use of the word in Luke 16:4; Acts 13:22; 19:26, and of a related form in 1 Cor. 13:2. Josephus uses the word in speaking of the transplanting of the Israelites into the kingdom of Assyria at the time of the invasion of Tiglath-pileser III (*Antiquities* ix. 11. 1 [235]).

Kingdom. That is, the kingdom of grace (see on Matt. 4:17; 5:3).

Of his dear Son. Literally, “the Son of His love,” meaning, perhaps, the Son who is the object of God’s love (cf. on Matt. 3:17; Eph. 1:6).

14. We have redemption. This verse largely parallels Eph. 1:7 (see comment there). Christ is the One through whose atoning death men obtain redemption (see on Rom. 3:24).

Through his blood. Textual evidence attests (cf. p. 10) the omission of this phrase. However, the phrase is well attested in the parallel passage, Eph. 1:7 (see comment there). See *Problems in Bible Translation*, p. 223.

Forgiveness. Gr. *aphesis*, “release,” “pardon.” See on Luke 3:3. Thus Paul ends the introduction to this epistle (vs. 1–14). He has thanked God for what he has heard of the progress of the Colossian Christians. He has solicited help from Heaven for them to grow in true knowledge of the divine will. These petitions have been constantly arising from the apostle’s heart, especially since he received a direct report concerning the Colossian believers. Then he reminds them of their privileges in having been translated into the kingdom of light, and of what joy should be theirs since having been emancipated from the power of darkness.

15. Who is. Having completed his prologue (vs. 1–14), the apostle now enters his major theme, a discussion of the person and position of Christ.

Image. Gr. *eikōn*, “similitude,” “likeness.” Compare ch. 3:10, where Paul declares that the Christian is renewed “after the image [*eikōn*] of him that created him.” The image of the Roman emperor on ancient coins was called an *eikōn* (Matt. 22:20).

The invisible God. “No man hath seen God at any time,” but Jesus, “the image of the invisible God,” came to reveal Him to men (see on John 1:18).

Firstborn. Gr. *prōtotokos* (see on Rom. 8:29). In Matt. 1:25; Luke 2:7, *prōtotokos* is used of Christ as the first-born of Mary. In Heb. 11:28 the word is used of the first-born of Egypt who perished in the plagues. In Heb. 12:23 the word describes the members of the “church of the first-born.” In the remaining references (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5) *prōtotokos* is applied to Christ (see comments on these scriptures).

There has been much discussion throughout the centuries as to the meaning of *prōtotokos* in Col. 1:15. The early Church Fathers applied the expression to Christ as the eternal Son of God. The Arians used this verse to show that Christ Himself was a created being. Such an interpretation, though possible as far as the grammar of the passage is concerned, is elsewhere contradicted in Scripture (see on Additional Note in John 1). The passage may be understood in a way that brings it wholly in harmony with the general teaching of Scripture. This accords with sound principles of scriptural exegesis.

In Heb. 1:6 *prōtotokos* clearly refers to the incarnation, and some have tried to make the same application in Col. 1:15. Others believe that in Colossians Paul is referring to the resurrection (see on Acts 13:33). However, neither interpretation fits the context, for

Christ is here presented as the Creator (cf. Col. 1:16), and as preceding creation (cf. on John 1:1–3, 14).

It seems best, therefore, to regard *prōtotokos* as a figurative expression describing Jesus Christ as first in rank, the figure being drawn from the dignity and office held by the first-born in a human family, or, more precisely, the first-born in a royal family. Christ's position is unique, authoritative, and absolute. He has been entrusted with all prerogatives and authority in heaven and earth. Paul emphasizes the position of Christ because he is seeking to meet the arguments of the false teachers, who declared that Christ was created, and who denied His supremacy.

Creature. Gr. *ktisis*, “the act of creating,” “a created thing,” “a creature.” For “every creature” certain English version (see RV; RSV) read “all creation.” The Greek may be translated either way. The context seems to favor the reading “every creature.” Christ is shown to be above every created thing. See on Rev. 3:14.

16. *For by him.* Gr. *hoti en autō*, literally, “for in Him,” here probably not denoting agency, since this is expressed later in the verse by *di’ autou*, “by him.” *En autō* probably stresses that Christ is the center, the source, the sphere, in which creation originated.

Were all things created. Literally, “all the things were created.” For a discussion of Christ as Creator see on John 1:3. The exercise of creative power was proof of the divinity of Christ.

Heaven ... earth. This expression seems here to include the entire universe. All things, material or immaterial, are designated by this term.

Invisible. Doubtless a reference to spirit beings and powers (see below on “thrones ... powers”).

Thrones ... powers. See on Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21. These terms were doubtless those used by the false teachers at Colossae to describe their classification of angelic orders. These heretical teachers probably classed Christ on a level with these orders. If so, Paul met the doctrine head-on by declaring that whether there were such orders or not, Christ created them all, and consequently was far above them in rank.

Were created. The form of the verb thus translated is different from that translated “created” earlier in the verse. Here the words means “stands created,” with emphasis upon the effects of creation, whereas the earlier word refers to creation simply as a specific act that occurred at some point in history.

By him. Gr. *di’ autou* (see above on “for by him”). The phrase expresses agency. See on John 1:3.

For him. Literally, “unto Him.” Christ is the goal toward which all creation moves for its justification and very existence. He is “the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev. 22:13).

17. *He.* Emphatic in the Greek, meaning, “He Himself.” Christ is contrasted with created beings.

Is. Gr. *esti*, a form of the verb *eimi*, “to be,” expressing, like *ēn* in John 1:1, continuity of existence (see comment there). “He is” may be compared with the expression “I am” (see on John. 6:20; 8:58).

Before. Both in time and rank. As the mind wings backward into eternity, there is no point before which Christ is not (see on John 1:1; see Additional Note on John 1).

By him. Rather, as in v. 16, “in Him.” Christ is the sphere within which everything consists.

Consist. Gr. *sunistēmi*, literally, “to stand together,” “to hold together” or “to cohere.” The form of the verb in Greek stresses an original organization and a continued maintenance of the organization. The power that holds the far-flung orbs of the universe on their appointed courses with mathematical accuracy, the power that holds the particles of the atom in their predetermined orbits, is the same. By the power of Christ all things cohere. Not only did He bring them into being, He maintains them each moment.

18. He is. Gr. *autos estin*, “he himself is,” the same phrase that opens v. 17 (see comment there).

Head of the body. As the head supplies the planning, ruling, deciding power to the body, and all the activities of the body are completely and continuously dependent upon the functioning of the head, so Christ functions for the body spiritual. This figure is frequent in the writings of Paul (see on 1 Cor. 12:12–27; Eph. 1:22).

Church. Gr. *ekklēsia*. See on Matt. 18:17.

Beginning. This expression may be understood either passively, showing Christ’s priority as to both time and rank, or actively, in the sense that Christ is the originator (cf. on Rev. 1:8). Some understand the expression as applying especially to what follows, declaring Christ to be the “beginning” of those who will be raised from the dead. Paul calls Him also the “firstfruits of them that slept” (see on 1 Cor. 15:20, 23). True, Moses and Lazarus were resurrected in point of time before Christ rose from the tomb, but it was only by virtue of His resurrection that these men came back to life.

Jesus is here set before the believers as possessing not only primacy and priority in time but also precedence in power and prestige. Since He is before all things, He therefore cannot be an emanation, or a lower, subsidiary order of creation. Paul’s declaration meets the arguments of the false teachers at Colossae.

Firstborn. Gr. *prōtotokos* (see on v. 15).

From the dead. As having been one of them, as the Greek implies (cf. on Rev. 1:18).

In all things. Since in the immediate context Christ’s priority has to do with the church, His position regarding “all things” also has to do with the church (see Col. 3:11; cf. Eph. 1:23). However, the statement is also true with respect to His position of sovereignty and priority relative to the entire universe.

He might have the preeminence. Literally, “He might come to hold first rank.” Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power, . . . by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4; cf. Phil. 2:9).

19. It pleased the Father. The words “the Father” are supplied. Commentators are divided as to whether they are correctly supplied or whether “all fulness” should be made the subject of the sentence, which is grammatically possible. According to the latter construction the verse would read, “For all the fulness was pleased to dwell in him” (cf. RSV). The Father seems to be the subject of v. 20, so that it is not unnatural to have it the implied subject in v. 19 also. The passage also makes good sense when “all fulness” is made the subject. Either reading suits the context.

The Church at the Close of Paul's Ministry.

2



Fulness. Gr. *plērōma*, “plenitude,” “fullness,” “that which has been completed,”

“complement.” *Plērōma* was used in secular Greek to designate the full complement of a ship’s crew or of reserves of troops, to describe a population reaching the saturation point, to indicate the total amount necessary to complete a financial transaction, and to designate the materials necessary to complete a building. In the NT it generally has this meaning of completeness (see Mark 2:21; 6:43; Rom. 13:10; 1 Cor. 10:26; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10, 23). It appears that the false teachers at Colossae, like the later Gnostics, maintained that some of the functions of the Deity, such as mediation and certain powers of creation, resided in angels or lesser orders of created beings. Paul is telling the perverters of truth that the sum totality of every function of Deity resides in Christ. Thus He is Lord of all created things. This fullness resided in Christ from the beginning.

Dwell. Gr. *katoikeō*, “to have a permanent and settled abode” (cf. ch. 2:9). The false teachers maintained that Divinity resided in Jesus only partially and temporarily. Paul is setting the Colossians right on this point. Not only does Jesus possess, as a permanent prerogative, the fullness of divine purpose and power, He also expresses in fullness the

²Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Col 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

traits of the divine personality (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13; Col. 2:9). The Saviour was the expression of the Father's glory; He was the visible image of His person (ch. 1:15). In Christ is realized the perfect expression of the Godhead completely and eternally. This expression of Divinity reached its complete manifestation only when the sacrifice of the Saviour took place, because the sacrificial aspect of His divine perfection was not seen prior to His death.

20. *Having made peace.* Peace is necessary because the entrance of sin into the universe had brought with it alienation.

The KJV of v. 20 does not correctly reflect the order of clauses in the Greek, and consequently somewhat obscures the sense. The following literal translation reflects the order in the Greek: "And through him to reconcile all things unto him, having made peace through the blood of his cross, through him, whether the things upon the earth, or the things in the heavens." The phrase "through him to reconcile" should therefore be connected with v. 19. If the reading of the KJV of v. 19 is accepted (see on v. 19), the thought is, "It pleased God through him to reconcile all things." The false teachers apparently contended that peace was being brought about through the mediation of the angels.

Blood of his cross. For the significance of the blood of Christ in the plan of salvation see on Rom. 3:25. The cross of Christ is the high point in the plan of salvation. It was the subject in which Paul gloried (Gal. 6:14). It will be the science and the song of the redeemed through eternal ages (GC 651).

By him. This phrase appears twice in this verse, in the first instance in the emphatic position in the Greek. Jesus is the agent through which the reconciliation is brought about.

Reconcile. Gr. *apokatalassō*, an intensified form of Paul's usual word for reconciliation, *katalasso* (see on Rom. 5:10).

All things. There has been much discussion as to whether this expression includes non reasoning and inanimate creation. In what sense would these require reconciliation? The apostle may be discussing the far-reaching effects of the entrance of sin into the universe, and thus include the effects of sin and redemption not only upon intelligent beings but upon unreasoning and inanimate creation as well (cf. on Rom. 8:19).

In earth. Adam's transgression had its repercussions in every part of this earth. From man, the crowning masterpiece of the Creator, to plant, insect, and marine life, and even to the inanimate earth, degeneracy resulted. The redemptive act of Christ will ultimately restore perfection and harmony.

In heaven. Some commentators hold that although only one third of the angels rebelled against God's government and were expelled from heaven, the rest of the angelic hosts did not fully understand the sinfulness of sin or its dire results until Christ died on the cross. After this event, celestial beings realized as never before that God's ways are true and righteous, and that Satan's program leads to death. Thus, all things, material as well as spiritual, heavenly as well as earthly, will be brought to a state of perfect harmony through the cross and all for which it stands. Time and the unfolding purposes of God through Christ will expose Satan and those who sympathize with him so that the justice of God will be seen in their annihilation. The plan of redemption will accomplish its broader and deeper purpose—namely, the vindication of God's character before the universe (see PP 68).

21. And you. Paul now makes personal applications to his Colossian brethren of the doctrines he has been discussing. He has argued that the entire world is dependent upon the blood of Christ for reconciliation (see on v. 19). Now he tells the Colossians that they can enter into this glorious state of harmony and joy only by this same road. His statement implies a warning not to accept the views of the false teachers, who may suggest other means of reconciliation, such as the ministry of angels and other spirits (cf. ch. 2:8, 18, 19). There is only one means of salvation (Acts. 4:12).

Sometime alienated. Or, “formerly alienated.” This unfortunate condition would still be in existence for the Colossian believers were it not for the ministry of Christ on their behalf. On the cross of Calvary an atonement had been provided for the sin that had caused the alienation. The sinner’s attitude of hostility had been changed and God had accepted the sinner.

Enemies. Not only were the Colossians before conversion estranged from God, ignorant of His purposes for mankind, and indifferent to His law; they were also openly and positively hostile to Him.

In your mind. The mind is the central, directive faculty of a rational being (see Eph. 4:18). Paul is here reminding the Colossians that their entire thinking had been in a state of estrangement and hostility toward God. Every creative, deciding attitude of their minds was against God or indifferent to Him. They were in a hopeless and lost condition, dependent on some heavenly influence to bring them to a state where they might be saved.

By wicked works. Or, “in [the sphere of] the wicked works.” As a man thinks, so will he act (cf. Prov. 23:7). It is impossible for a wicked mind to do other than produce wicked works. So with the Colossians, the actions of their lives evidenced the state of their minds. Before their conversion, the record of their lives gave irrefutable proof of their alienation from God and their enmity toward Him.

Yet now. Notwithstanding the Colossians’ condition of alienation, God acted. His reconciling ministry becomes effective the moment men accept it.

Hath he reconciled. See on Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:20. Christ has, as it were, taken the Colossian believers by the hand and presented them to the Father, not as servants or enemies, but as friends (John 15:14–16). The cross of Calvary has banished their hostility, changed the current of their minds, and transformed them into the likeness of Christ.

22. Body of his flesh. Some believe that Paul is here combating a heresy that early crept into the Christian church; namely, that Christ did not have a human body. According to this heresy the human body is essentially sinful, and therefore could have been no part of the Son of God. An important step in the reconciliation of man with God was the incarnation. Divinity was clothed with humanity. Jesus took hold of fallen humanity that it might once more be joined with the throne of God. He partook of flesh and blood, that therein He might deliver man from the thralldom of sin. Christ in His body of flesh achieved the victory of reconciliation (see 1 Peter 2:24). See Vols. V, pp. 917–919; VI, p. 58.

Through death. Or, “by means of death.” The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). All have sinned (Rom. 3:23). Therefore none may escape death. Christ, in assuming the lot of humanity, purposed to pay the penalty for humanity’s sin. His death was for every man. This fact had been prefigured by every true sacrifice since the day that Adam offered up

the first victim at the behest of God. Sacrificial, vicarious death pointed forward to atonement through the blood of Christ. All these ceremonies of sacrifice and mediation looked forward to final reconciliation with God. Death was the basis of it all.

To present you. When reconciliation has been achieved, those who were alienated from God and hostile to Him will be presented before the universe as trophies of the cross (see 2 Cor. 4:14; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:28).

Holy and unblameable. Gr. *hagioi kai amōmoi* (see on Eph. 1:4).

Unreproveable. Gr. *anegklētoi*, “blameless,” “irreproachable.” Compare the use of the word in 1 Cor. 1:8. *Anegklētoi* takes the picture of perfection one step further. It emphasizes that there must be no possibility of bringing a charge against him whom God purposes to present perfect before the universe. The accuser of the brethren will be silenced as the Lord rebukes him and points out that the saints are clothed with the righteousness of Christ (Zech. 3:1–5; Rev. 12:10, 11).

In his sight. All men will pass before the scrutinizing eye of God. The Judge of all the earth will see everything. In this life men may deride, Satan may still find fault, but the matter of greatest import is, What does God see and think? (see 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 1:4). The divine estimate is all that counts.

23. If ye continue. The Colossians had heard the word of life. They had accepted the faith and had been reconciled by the blood of Christ. They were “saints and faithful brethren” (v. 2). But all their efforts would prove futile if they should fail to “continue.” The apostle stresses their need of abiding and remaining in their confidence in the gospel.

In the faith. Compare v. 4. What had been begun by faith in the experience of the Colossian believers must be continued by means of faith also.

Grounded. Gr. *themelioō*, “to lay a foundation,” “to found.” The spiritual house should have its foundation fixed upon the solid Rock, which is Christ, not upon the sand, as was the house of the foolish man in Christ’s parable (see Luke 6:49; 1 Cor. 10:4).

Settled. Gr. *hedraioi*, “firm,” “steadfast.” The Christian believer must be firmly fixed on his foundation. Paul warns the Colossians against moving away from the position taken by them when they first heard the gospel.

Not moved away. This is the negative view of what he has already said. “Do not allow yourself,” Paul says in effect, “to be shifted from your position by the philosophical arts of false teachers or the seductive allurements of sin.” The tense of the verb he uses suggests the thought, “Be not continually shifting” from one position to another (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58).

Hope of the gospel. That is, the hope that the gospel provides. This hope, he has already intimated (see on v. 5), is the driving force of the plan of salvation. It is brought to light by the message of the gospel; it belongs to the gospel. When hope is ultimately achieved in the kingdom of God, the purposes of the plan of salvation will have been fulfilled.

Ye have heard. See on v. 5.

Preached to every creature. The principal stress of the passage is upon the fact that the gospel the Colossians had heard is the same as that preached in all parts where the gospel has penetrated. Paul does not mean that the gospel has gone everywhere in the absolute sense. This is clear from his statements elsewhere regarding the progress of the

gospel. Writing to the Romans only a few years before, Paul, summing up the advance of the gospel, said, "From Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 15:19). He was hoping at this time to visit Rome and from there carry the gospel to Spain (Rom. 15:24). His arrest and imprisonment intervened so that his plans were not carried out. Instead of coming to Rome as a free herald of the gospel, he came bound. Being a prisoner, he could not visit Spain. It is doubtful that any work of significance had been begun there. There is, further, no evidence that at this early date the gospel had penetrated into the barbarian regions to the north of the then-civilized world. The same is doubtless true of other far-flung regions. It is clear, then, that the statement that the gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven was not meant in an absolute sense. Like the statement "as it is in all the world" (Col. 1:6), the stress is upon the fact that the gospel preached in Colossae is the same as that proclaimed in all the world. Compare Matt. 24:41; 1 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 5:13; 14:6, 7; DA 633.

Whereof I Paul. The apostle abruptly injects himself into his line of argument, in the same manner as he had introduced the Colossian believers into it in v. 21.

Am made. Or, "became." Compare Eph. 3:7. Paul here refers to the divine commission to preach the gospel. God was now using him for the accomplishment of eternal duties (see Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:11–16; cf. Gal. 1:11–17). A divine hand had drawn him into the over-all plan for man's salvation. When the Colossians compared Paul with the false teachers, they should think of God's eternal purposes and realize that the one who was writing to them was part of the great plan to bring about their salvation. Paul's message, therefore, came with divine authorization. The believers' faith should be strengthened and their steadfastness increased by this thought.

Minister. Gr. *diakonos* (see on Mark 9:35). Compare the use of the word in Matt. 20:26; Rom. 13:4; Eph. 6:21; 1 Tim. 4:6.

24. Who now rejoice. Literally, "now I am rejoicing." Paul breaks into joyous thanksgiving because the cause of God is advancing. Compare Acts 16:25; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 11:16–33; Phil. 2:17.

Sufferings for you. Compare Eph. 3:1. Paul rejoices in bearing persecution for Christ's sake, if through this experience the faith of Christians can be increased.

Fill up. Gr. *antanaplēroō*, "to fill up in turn," "to fill up vicariously." The word occurs in the NT only here.

That which is behind. Literally, "the lacking things," that is, what is lacking. Tribulation and affliction are the lot of the Christian (see Acts 14:22; Phil. 1:29; cf. 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10; 1 Thess. 3:3). Paul is thinking of the sufferings he will be called upon to endure. He is happy that he can bear afflictions for the cause of Christ.

Afflictions of Christ. That is, afflictions for Christ. The phrase must not be understood as describing the sufferings Christ endured, for then the passage would imply that there was something lacking in the sufferings of Christ. Furthermore, the word translated "afflictions" is nowhere used of the sufferings of Christ.

In my flesh. That is, Paul's personal sufferings.

For his body's sake. That is, for the sake of Christ's body—His church (cf. Eph. 1:22, 23).

25. Am made a minister. Or, "became a minister" (see on v. 23).

Dispensation. Gr. *oikonomia*, “arrangement,” “stewardship” (see on Eph. 1:10; Eph. 3:2). The great rule that governs Paul is the over-all purpose and plan of God. Paul declares that, in this overruling providence of God, he has now been assigned a stewardship.

Fulfil the word of God. The purpose of Paul’s stewardship is to preach the Word of God. It is the apostle’s aim to carry this out to the full.

26. Mystery. Gr. *mustērion* (see on Rom. 11:25).

Hid from ages. Compare Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3, 5, 9. The full blessings of the gospel era were only vaguely apprehended by the patriarchs and the successive generations of men.

Now is made manifest. See on 1 Cor. 2:9, 10; Eph. 3:5.

27. God would make known. Literally, “God willed to make known.” It is God’s plan that His people shall penetrate deeper mysteries of divine knowledge by the help of His Holy Spirit. In turn, through their receiving this revelation, God will so transform their dispositions that saintly characters will be the result.

Riches of the glory. Compare on Rom. 9:23; cf. Eph. 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16.

Gentiles. That this glorious mystery should also embrace the Gentiles came as a shock to the Jews. But God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34); His mercy extends to all who accept Him. The apostle is stressing the universality of the scope of the plan of salvation.

Christ in you. The indwelling presence of Jesus in the human heart is the manifestation of the eternal mystery (see on Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:1).

Hope of glory. Compare v. 5. By inaugurating the plan of salvation, God placed before fallen humanity the hope of restoration to the divine presence. The incarnation of Christ brought the realization of this hope one stage nearer. The indwelling of Christ in the individual heart gives evidence that the power of grace is working to transform the character. This makes real the hope of glorification. The Christian lives in the kingdom of grace today, which gives him assurance that he will one day dwell with Christ in the kingdom of glory. Compare Rom. 8:18; 1 Tim. 1:1.

28. Whom we preach. The “we” is emphatic in the Greek. Paul contrasts himself and his associates with the false teachers.

Warning. Gr. *noutheteō*, “to put in mind,” “to admonish,” “to warn” (cf. on Eph. 6:4).

Every man. The threefold repetition of these words in this verse underlines the universality of the gospel. There is no exclusiveness in Paul’s teachings, as there was in those of the false teachers. Every class of society is to be reached with the gospel of salvation.

Teaching. Besides warning, Paul also instructs. So should it be with all preaching.

In all wisdom. Some commentators understand this as stating the manner of Paul’s teaching (cf. Eph. 1:8; Col. 4:5); others, that the textbook of study for this teaching ministry is the whole field of wisdom. The former seems more in harmony with the Greek.

That we may present. Compare on v. 22. The apostle has identified himself with the work of saving souls, and now he states the goal of his ministry.

Perfect. Gr. *teleios* (see on Matt. 5:48). The perfection of which Paul speaks in his epistles, he clarifies in Phil. 3:12–15 (see comment there).

In Christ Jesus. This is the key phrase of the Epistle to the Ephesians (see on Eph. 1:1). It is frequent also in Paul's other epistles. Christ is the sphere of the saint's perfection.

29. Whereunto. That is, with the objection of presenting "every man" (v. 28) perfect in Christ.

Labour. Gr. *kopiaō*, "to work with effort," "to toil to the point of exhaustion." Compare the use of the word in 1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16.

Striving. Gr. *agonizō*, "to contend earnestly" (see on Luke 13:24). The word suggests the utmost of effort put forth by the contestant in the athletic arena.

Working. Gr. *energeia*, "operative power," distinguished from *dunamis*, which denotes potential power. Our English word "energy" comes from *energeia*. Compare the use of *energeia* in Eph. 1:19; 3:7; 4:16; Phil. 3:21; etc.

Worketh. Gr. *energeō*, "to be at work," "to operate," "to be effective." Compare the noun form *energeia* (see above under "working"). Paul realized that the performance of duty required earnest effort, furthermore that the results would be effective for good only in so far as individual effort was combined with the mighty power of God energizing every faculty of the human agent.

Mightily. Literally, "in power." Paul could bear testimony to the power of the Saviour because it had worked mightily within his own life.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1–29 TM 221

2 AA 471

4 SL 85

7–12 AA 471; 4T 316

9 AA 478; ML 110

9, 10 5T 746

9–11 GC 476; MH 426; SL 85

9–12 2T 521

11 ML 52

11–13 AA 478

12 CS 133; GC xii; MB 8

13 DA 320; SC 112

14 GW 147; 6T 60

14–17 6T 59

16 GC 493; PP 34

16, 17 AA 472; Ed 132

18 Ed 268

19 Ed 30; MB 21; 2T 200

20 AA 209

21, 22 AA 472; CT 152

23 AA 593; DA 633; Ed 96; 1T 355; 3T 225; 4T 409, 556; 5T 520;

8T 15, 19, 26
 24 COL 191
 25–28 TM 222
 25–29 AA 368; GW 59; 2T 502, 552; 4T 269, 314
 27 AA 328, 476, 507; AH 120; CH 362; CT 194, 554; Ed 172, 309; Ev 511; FE 263, 279, 466; GW 61, 282, 366; LS 431; MB 128; ML 26, 84, 301; MYP 142; SC 47; 1T 162, 566; 2T 73; 7T 116; WM 38
 28 AA 206; Ev 587; GW 369; ML 285; TM 152; 4T 315, 317, 416; 5T 300, 372
 28, 29 2T 609
 29 MB 144; 4T 315

CHAPTER 2

3

1 *He still exhorteth them to be constant in Christ, 8 to beware of philosophy, and vain traditions, 18 worshipping of angels, 20 and legal ceremonies, which are ended in Christ.*

1. I would that ye knew. Or, “I wish you to know.” Compare 1 Cor. 11:3. Compare the expression, “I would not have you to be ignorant” (1 Thess. 4:13; cf. Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1).

Conflict. Gr. *agōn*, “contest,” “struggle,” “trial,” here a mental struggle, “solicitude,” “anxiety.” For the related verb *agōnizō* see on ch. 1:29. Paul’s anxiety, the tears he shed, the agonizing contest against the power of the adversary that he waged—all this, Paul desired the Colossians to know. Little did the believers of Colossae realize the hours Paul had earnestly spent interceding for them.

Laodicea. This town was situated about 10 mi. from the city of Colossae. The state of this church was evidently similar to that of the believers of Colossae. Therefore Paul included them in his devotions.

Not seen. From the language here employed many commentators have drawn the conclusion that Paul was not the founder of the Colossian church, further, that he never visited the church. They believe that the record of the movements of Paul in Acts leaves it very indefinite as to whether Paul ever visited any part of the Lycus Valley, in which Colossae was situated. They do not believe that references to Phrygia necessarily imply a visit to the Lycus Valley, for Phrygia covers a large and vaguely outlined region. The territory is thought to lie considerably to the north and east of the Lycus Valley. On his First Missionary Journey Paul probably came no nearer than 150 mi. (c. 240 km.) from Colossae. On his second and third missionary tours the apostle need not even have approached the region of Colossae. Leaving Galatia to the far north and east, he could have traveled to Ephesus by the Roman road through Sardis. This would have kept him well to the north of the Lycus Valley. Furthermore, on these trips he confined himself to revisiting the churches he had already established, and there is no hint whatever that Colossae was one of them at that early date. Thus the book of Acts leaves the matter of Paul’s visit to Colossae most improbable.

³Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Col 1:20). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Others contend that Col. 2:1 does not necessarily imply that Paul had never visited Colossae. They maintain that it is highly unlikely that in his two visits to Phrygia (see Acts 16:6; 18:23) Paul could have missed Colossae entirely. They also maintain that since in his epistle to the Colossians he holds such an intimate connection with many members of the church, he had most likely been there. They interpret Col. 2:1 thus: “I have much anxiety, not only for you, but *even* for those who have never seen me.” By this interpretation the Colossians are placed in one group, in contrast with another group whom Paul has not seen face to face.

Further considerations throw light on this question. In his letter to the Colossians the apostle himself speaks as if he had never visited their city. He describes himself as *hearing* of their faith in Christ and their love for the saints (ch. 1:4). He recalls the time when he had been encouraged by the recital of their Christian profession and zeal for the principles of the gospel (v. 9; cf. v. 6). Many times during the epistle, Paul had ample opportunity to make reference to his personal contacts with the Colossian believers, but he never does so. He records that they had been taught the principles of the gospel by another, and he also refers to his own preaching. But not once does he couple the two ideas, although the two statements are side by side (cf. chs. 1:5–8, 21–23, 25, 28, 29; 2:5, 6). Had Paul visited Colossae and worked in that city, one would expect a reference in the epistle to some incident connected with the visit. But Colossians contains not a single such allusion. Although the argument of silence cannot be regarded as conclusive, most commentators agree that it is very unlikely that Paul was the founder of the church at Colossae. Though, perhaps, less certainty exists concerning the possibility of a visit there, this too appears unlikely.

2. Hearts. Here meaning the seat of the emotions and of the intellect. Paul wished the whole personality to be satisfied with abiding peace and assurance (cf. on Eph. 6:22).

Comforted. Gr. *parakaleō*, “to comfort,” “to exhort,” “to cheer,” “to encourage.”

Knit together. Gr. *sumbibazō*, “to bring together,” “to unite.” Paul desired them to maintain their unity and stability in affectionate regard one for the other, and for God. Compare Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19.

Riches of the full assurance. Or, “wealth of the firm persuasion.” Compare 1 Thess. 1:5; Heb. 6:11; 10:22. As believers learn the deeper truths of God’s teaching, their assurance becomes firmer. When Christians truly know the Lord’s ways, they cannot but trust. And this trust is based on understanding.

Acknowledgement. Gr. *epignōsis*, “precise knowledge,” “full knowledge.” Compare Eph. 1:17.

Mystery. Gr. *mustērion* (see on Rom. 11:25).

And of the Father. Textual evidence is divided (cf. p. 10) among a number of variant readings for the remainder of this verse, but favors the view that “Christ” is in apposition with “the mystery of God” (cf. ch. 1:26, 27), thus reading “mystery of God, even Christ.” This mystery concerning Christ embraces His incarnation and personal ministry (1 Tim. 3:16). It also includes the further purpose of the incarnation in making it possible for all who believe, including Gentiles, to become members of the mystic body of Christ, His church (Rom. 11:25; Eph. 3:4–6). The proclamation of this good news to the world—that all have an opportunity of salvation through the exercise of personal faith in a Saviour who died for all—is a necessary part of making known this mystery (Eph. 6:19).

3. *Are hid.* Or, “are stored away.” In Christ, in His office and function, in His person and ministry, in the fact that He is both Son of God and Son of man, are embedded the details of the mystery of God. He is the source as He is the treasure house of the blessings of God. Paul desired to lift the minds of the Colossian Christians above and beyond mere human ideas to God’s Son and the eternal virtues and verities revealed in Him. In Christ may be discovered all that God purposes to reveal in blessing for humanity. Why, then, should the Colossians give ear to human speculations (see on v. 4)?

All the treasures. Jesus is the mine from which all true riches come. To those who receive Him, He gives truth in its fullness. Other teachers have given partial and obscure glimmerings of knowledge, but in Christ, the living Word, resides the essential knowledge. See COL 104–114.

Wisdom and knowledge. Christ is the treasure house of divine wisdom and knowledge (see 1 Cor. 1:22, 24; Eph. 3:9–11). Those who receive Jesus have come to the source of all they need for this life and for the hereafter.

4. *This I say.* Paul now gives the reason for what he has been saying in vs. 1–3. There must be no mistake about the vital nature of his theme, and about the grave responsibility in neglecting to obtain a full knowledge of the mystery of God, which is Christ (see on v. 2; ch. 1:27).

Should beguile you. Paul now comes to grips with the practical application of his message. The possibility of being deluded is ever present. The Christian must beware of the craft that seeks to lure him away from the straight line of truth.

Enticing words. Literally, “persuasive speech” (cf. Rom. 16:18; 1 Cor. 2:4). This may find lodgment in the minds of the unwary. The smooth arguments and subtly woven ideas may take the Christian off his guard. But within such reasoning lies error. Paul warns the believers to test the arguments and claims of false teachers (cf. Col. 2:8).

5. *Absent in the flesh.* The apostle would have the believers sense his personal regard for them, even though he is not actually present in person.

With you in the spirit. Paul’s body may be in confinement in faraway Rome, but his heart encompasses the converts he loves. His mind seeks solutions for their problems. His soul is lifted up to their common Father in heaven in thanksgiving and intercession. Thus the apostle draws a contrast between those who would seduce them through sophistries, and their spiritual father, who would, if need be, give his life for them. Those false teachers have ulterior motives; Paul is completely selfless.

Joying and beholding. Epaphras had brought Paul word of the continued faithfulness of the Colossian believers (ch. 1:7, 8). In his mind’s eye in Rome he watched the members in distant Colossae as they went about their tasks of living and witnessing for Jesus.

Order. Gr. *taxis*, “arrangement.” This is a common military term. It suggests organization, firmness, and well-ordered battle array (cf. its use in 1 Cor. 14:40; Heb. 5:6). Paul had doubtless watched many an army parade, and had seen many a centurion at the head of his well-drilled and perfectly disciplined company. Thus the Colossian church must act against sin.

Stedfastness. Epaphras had done a good work. The Colossian church was a compact spiritual community, moving forward with confidence to meet the common enemy. The battle was joined within the sphere of their faith, their confidence in the things of Christ. Paul is hinting that they should continue in this happy and blessed state.

6. As ye have therefore received. “As” refers to the manner in which they had received the message of salvation preached by Epaphras (ch. 1:7). While the apostle rejoices with them in the measure of faithfulness they already have (ch. 2:5), he kindly, but firmly, admonishes them to hold on to it.

Christ Jesus the Lord. These three titles of the Messiah gather within themselves the fullness of His position and functions. His mission as Saviour is embodied in the name “Jesus” (Matt. 1:21). “Christ” suggests His Messianic office, and “Lord” (see on 1 Cor. 12:3) His identification with, in some instances at least, the Yahweh of the OT.

Walk. Gr. *peripateō*, “to conduct oneself” (see on Eph. 2:2). Paul urges the believers to keep on continuously conducting themselves and their affairs within the sphere marked out by their trust in Jesus, doing only what He would do, and interesting themselves exclusively in the things that would please Him.

7. Rooted. The form of the Greek word suggests fixity with continued stability.

Built up. In the experience of the Colossian believers the foundation of their spiritual building was Jesus Himself (cf. on 1 Cor. 3:11).

In him. Paul has here gathered three different metaphors into close proximity. The believers are to *walk*, take *root*, and be *built up* as a mighty temple for the Lord. All of these activities are to take place “in him.” Jesus Christ is the pattern according to which they must walk; He is the root from whom they must draw sap and nourishment; He is the living Rock, the sure Foundation, upon whom Jews and Gentiles are alike to build. He is “broad enough for all, and strong enough to sustain the weight and burden of the whole world” (AA 175).

Stablished. Gr. *bebaioō*, “to confirm,” “to establish.” The form of the verb in Greek shows that Paul is here emphasizing a continuous process of strengthening. Daily the Colossians were to become more firmly established.

As ye have been taught. The efficiency of Epaphras as a “minister of Christ” (ch. 1:7) is here again emphasized. He had instructed them correctly. They had learned in whom to believe and how to live with Him so as to obtain righteousness and eternal life.

Abounding. Or, “being continually abounding.” The word suggests a state of “overflowing.” It is possible for us continually to abound, for Heaven’s resources are greater, much greater than our greatest need. Since the supply is limitless, Christians are to appropriate all that they need. The all-sufficient Christ will give to us “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

Therein. Textual evidence may be cited (cf. p. 10) for the omission of this word, also for the reading “in him,” referring to Christ.

With thanksgiving. Or, “in thanksgiving.” Progress in the Christian’s experience is possible only as the believer approaches God with a grateful heart. How can one be anything but thankful when surrounded by the boundless resources of Omnipotence? Since Christ is all and in all and with all, what has man to fear? The secret of true happiness is habitual reliance upon Christ. Thanksgiving is the fruit of this reliance.

8. Beware. There was a grave danger confronting the Colossian believers. Paul here calls their attention to it, and in solemn warning recommends that they face it. The crafty adversary was seeking to take from them the benefits they had gained. He was attempting to rob them of their spiritual advantages and to carry them off as a prey, leading them to destruction as deluded captives of error.

Spoil. Gr. *sulagōgeō*, “to carry off as plunder,” “to rob.” The spoiling may mean two things: the removal of blessings and privileges that the believers enjoy, or the enslavement of the believers themselves by Satan.

Philosophy and vain deceit. That is, philosophy even vain deceit, or philosophy which is vain deceit. The apostle is not condemning philosophy as such, nor is he denouncing philosophers. What he is warning against is philosophy such as the false teachers at Colossae were parading, which was in reality emptiness and vanity, and was promoted by deceit. The context suggests that this philosophy had to do with ceremonial observances, human beliefs, traditions, and materialistic habits and viewpoints, all of which tend away from the gospel of God. It was doubtless also made up of profitless speculation on puerile questions, an empty show of specious arguments devoid of facts. This kind of philosophy fills in the details of difficult questions with plausible theories, which have a tendency to deceive its devotees and to negate the preaching of the gospel of God. The center of this philosophy is the exaltation of man, while God is completely excluded or ignored (see 1T 297). The Christian should be forewarned and forearmed against those who teach it. Its end is eternal death.

Tradition. Gr. *paradosis* (see on Mark 7:3). Traditions are the habitual patterns of human beliefs and behavior, transmitted from one generation to the next. Traditions may be good or bad. Paul warns against those that are heretical, having a human instead of a divine source. Compare Gal. 1:14. Paul uses the word in a good sense in 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6.

Rudiments. Gr. *stoicheia*, “elements” (see on Gal. 4:3). In the language of philosophy *stoicheia* assumed the technical meaning of elemental matter. Mythologically, the elements were represented by various spirits, so that *stoicheia* also came to be applied to the spirits themselves. In non-Biblical writings *stoicheia* is also applied to evil spirits, to stars, and to stellar deities. There seems to have been a well-developed *stoicheia* cult in Colossae, which through its propaganda was making inroads into the Christian community there. The exact extent of its infiltration is not known. In sounding his warning, Paul uses the terminology of the cult.

After Christ. Literally, “according to Christ.” The norm must always be what Christ would have. Christ is placed in opposition to all deceitful philosophy. The wares of false teachers should be compared with the doctrines of the Master Teacher. Christ, the Creator and Sustainer, is the measuring rod of all true knowledge.

9. In him dwelleth. See on ch. 1:19. Within Christ dwells the sum total of the nature and attributes of God. All the offices and powers of Deity reside continually in Him. All the fullness of God is revealed in Christ.

Fulness. Gr. *plērōma* (see on Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:19). The encompassing stretch of this term is without limit in time and space and power. Everything that God is, every quality of Deity—dignity, authority, excellency, power in creating and fitting the world, energy in upholding and guiding the universe, love in redeeming mankind, forethought in supplying everything needful for each of His creatures—rests in Christ.

Godhead. Gr. *theotēs*, “Deity,” “the nature of God.” Compare *theiotēs*, “the nature of God” (see on Rom. 1:20).

Bodily. Doubtless a reference to the glorified body of Christ (Phil. 3:21), in which He ascended to heaven (cf. DA 832). The fullness of Deity resides in Him corporeally. This affirmation was doubtless to counter the false philosophies gaining acceptance in Colossae (see p. 184).

10. Are complete in him. Literally, “have been made full in him” (cf. Eph. 3:19; 5:18). In the sphere of the Christ, man not only may see his goal of perfection, but may also receive power to achieve it. As we accept His wisdom we become wise. Through daily communion with Him the likeness of the Divine becomes a reality within the human soul. There is nothing for this life or for eternity that man cannot receive through spiritual union with Christ. We may become complete in Him.

Principality and power. Compare on Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21; Col. 1:16. Paul is here again emphasizing that Christ is the head of all power and authority. His sovereign strength is the fountain of life. The apostle’s implication is that through Christ’s dwelling in us, the same victorious authority and creative power will enable us to triumph.

11. Are circumcised. Rather, “were circumcised.” The implication may be that some of the false teachers were claiming that before Christ is approached, circumcision and the details of the ceremonial law must be carried out (cf. Gal. 6:15). At least some of them may have claimed superiority because of their own state of circumcision.

Made without hands. Although the rite of circumcision was performed by hand, its significance and value lay in the fact of its inner meaning. It was designed to be an outward sign of an inward state of faith and grace. Through it Abraham indicated his belief that it was not he, but God, who had life and could give life to others. This peculiar sign was to distinguish all men of ancient Israel. It pointed to Israel’s complete devotion to Jehovah and obedience to all His requirements. An illustration of its true meaning is found in Israel’s history. At the time of the rebellion of Israel at Kadesh the people rejected God. God in turn, for a time, rejected them. Since they had proved unfaithful to His covenant, they were forbidden to receive the sign of that covenant. For 38 years circumcision was prohibited (see PP 406). When at last, believing and obedient, Israel crossed the Jordan, they were willing again to enter fully into covenant relationship with God; then this rite was once more carried out at God’s command (see Joshua 5:2–9). True circumcision is therefore a matter of the heart (see Deut. 10:16). The circumcision that the Colossian Christians had received was not external in the flesh. It was an inward change in heart and life typified by their baptism (see on Col. 2:12).

Putting off the body. See on Rom. 6:6; cf. Eph. 4:22.

Of the sins. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the omission of this phrase.

Of the flesh. That is, the carnal nature (see Rom. 7:14–25; 8:1–13).

Circumcision of Christ. That is, the circumcision that Christ performs, not that performed on Him. True spiritual circumcision, the removal and burying of the evil tendencies of the heart, is brought about through the agency of Jesus Christ Himself. His power alone can remove the old life and create a new man. From the ceremony of circumcision Paul draws a spiritual lesson for the Christian.

12. Buried with him. Death precedes burial. Christ laid down His life before He was buried in Joseph’s new tomb. Before the Christian can be buried with Christ, he must have surrendered his life. All the ambitions of his heart and the stirrings and longings of his fleshly passions must be yielded up to his Master. As far as he is concerned, his old

nature must die. Baptism is the sign of this self-renunciation, of the death of the old man and of his burial in the watery grave. Compare on Rom. 6:3, 4.

Ye are risen. Baptism not only signifies the separation through death of the sinful nature and the burial of that nature, it also signifies the birth of a new creature in Christ Jesus (see on Rom. 6:4).

Faith of the operation of God. That is, faith in the operation of God.

Raised him from the dead. Compare Eph. 1:19, 20. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead works a transformation in the believer.

13. *Dead in your sins.* Textual evidence is divided (cf. p. 10) between retaining and omitting the preposition “in.” If it is omitted, the phrase may still be translated, “in your sins,” but may also be rendered, “to your sins.” The expression may thus be understood in two ways: (1) Paul is here describing the former spiritual condition of the Colossian believers. Their hearts and minds and bodies were dead, or insensitive, to all spiritual things (cf. on Eph. 2:1, 5). (2) Believers are now dead to the appeals and influence of their sinful propensities (cf. on Rom. 6:2). This thought is an extension of what Paul has said in the previous verse. The Colossians, having put off their sinful ways by accepting Christ into their hearts, and having witnessed to this change by being baptized, may now be considered as being dead to their sins. They have by faith paid the penalty of death through Christ.

Uncircumcision of your flesh. This expression shows that those to whom Paul writes, and of whom he speaks as having true circumcision (v. 11), are Gentiles. It also describes the normal state of all mankind. Everyone is born into the world outside the covenant of grace (Eph. 2:12). The two ideas “dead in your sins” and “uncircumcision of your flesh” embrace both what man has personally deserved through the exercise of wrong choice or deliberate rebellion against God, and the natural state of condemnation into which all are born. Through Jesus Christ, cultivated and hereditary tendencies to sin are overcome.

Quickened together with him. Compare on Eph. 2:5. As the Father raised up Jesus Christ, even so may all believers be raised up as new creatures. This statement is descriptive of the mystery of the new birth. Divine power brought Jesus out of the tomb into eternal life. Within the realm of man’s heart and mind, the same divine power, working through the perfectly surrendered human will, raises man into the wonders of the new life of victory.

Having forgiven you. Textual evidence attests (cf. p. 10) the reading “having forgiven us.” The forgiveness of God precedes the quickening.

Trespases. Gr. *paraptōmata*, literally, “fallings aside” (see on Matt. 6:14). The word may be used to describe an arrow dropping to one side of the target, or a soldier dropping out from the ranks of his marching company. Men have fallen from their ideals. The forgiveness of sins includes a restoration, for fallen man, of the privileges and position that he has forfeited.

14. *Blotting out.* Gr. *exaleiphō*, “to wipe off,” “to wipe out.” The word is used in classical Greek for wiping out a writing. The form of the word appearing in the present verse should be translated “having blotted out.”

Handwriting. Gr. *cheirographon*, “a document written by hand.” The word occurs only here in the NT. Elsewhere the word is frequently used of handwritten documents often of a legal character, such as a bond signed by a debtor. Compare Philemon 19. The

“blotting out” of such a certificate of indebtedness was carried out only after the debt had been paid and the conditions of the note had been completely met. It was often done by placing an “X” over it, as shown by papyri examples. Also, the water-soluble ink on papyrus could be washed off or rubbed away, and new writing placed upon the material. Some commentators hold that the apostle is telling the Colossian church that their regeneration through the resurrection power of God, the restoration within them of His image, was carried out by God’s blotting out, or canceling, the indebtedness of the bond they were due to fulfill. Others see a more general reference to the Mosaic law, especially as interpreted by the Jews. The latter view seems to be more in harmony with the succeeding context. The similarity with the language of Eph. 2:15 and the parallel nature of these two epistles suggest strongly that the “handwriting of ordinances” is the same as the “law of commandments contained in ordinances” (see on Eph. 2:15).

Ordinances. Gr. *dogmata*, “decrees,” “statutes.” This refers to the various laws and decrees of the Jewish legal system such as terminated at the cross (see on Eph. 2:15).

Against us. As shown grammatically by the Greek, what is “against us” and “contrary to us” is the “handwriting.” Some have understood this as referring to the note of indebtedness that is against all, both Jew and Gentile; others, as referring to the Jewish legal system. For the manner in which the latter was contrary to both Jew and Gentile see on Acts 15:10; Eph. 2:15.

Took it out of the way. That is, the “handwriting.” “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness” (see on Rom. 10:4). Now that Christ has come, men are no longer under a schoolmaster (see on Gal. 3:25; Eph. 2:15).

Nailing it to his cross. The cross marks the transition from one economy (the Jewish) to the other (the Christian). This same idea is expressed in Eph. 2:16, where reconciliation is represented as taking place on the cross.

15. Having spoiled. Gr. *apekduomai*, literally, “to strip off one’s clothes.” Here, perhaps, “to strip off armor,” “to despoil.” There has been much discussion as to the subject of the action. Some hold that it is the Father, inasmuch as He is the subject of “quickened” (v. 13). Others believe that the passage is more suitably applied to Christ. Grammatically there is no way of determining, and the matter must be settled on the basis of the meaning of the passage (see below).

Principalities and powers. These terms may refer to earthly rulers (Luke 12:11; Titus 3:1) or to supernatural beings (see on Eph. 6:12). In the light of false teaching at Colossae, there may be a reference here to the supposed angelic powers and elemental deities (see p. 184; see on Col. 2:8). In reality Christ did triumph in a special sense over Satan and his angels. His death on the cross resulted in a further casting out of Satan from the sympathies of the heavenly world (see on Rev. 12:9). Throughout the ministry of Jesus, Satan was at hand to tempt and annoy Him. The life of Christ was a continual series of conflicts, but in every encounter Jesus proved victorious. Every effort on the part of Satan to destroy Him only further exposed the workings of the deceiver. Christ’s life of victory, culminating in Calvary, spelled the doom of the devil. Satan’s disguise was torn away. His methods of operation were laid open before the angels and the entire heavenly universe. He had exposed his true colors. See DA 123, 761. By His cross Jesus Christ stripped from the principalities and powers of darkness both their robe of office and authority as princes of this world, and their armor of strength in their warfare against

right. Thus it seems preferable to regard Jesus as the subject of the action expressed by “having spoiled” (see above).

Made a shew ... openly. Or, “made a public example” (RSV). Christ’s cruel death on Calvary caused Satan and his legions to be exposed to the view of the universe for what they are, murderers and fiends.

Triumphing. Gr. *thriambeuō* (see on 2 Cor. 2:14).

In it. Or, “in him.” The Greek may be understood either way. The “it” could refer to the “handwriting” or to the “cross” (v. 14). The “him” could refer to Christ if the Father is regarded as the subject of the action expressed in the verse (see above on “having spoiled”).

16. Therefore. That is, in view of the fact that the Jewish legal system was at an end, and with it the ceremonial system (see on Eph. 2:15).

Judge. This doubtless points to false teachers who among other things insisted on the binding claims of the Jewish ceremonial system (see p. 184).

In meat, or in drink. Or, “in eating or in drinking.” These words doubtless refer to the meal and drink offerings presented by the Israelites in compliance with the sacrificial system, which was codified in the ceremonial law. Some have erroneously concluded that Paul’s statement implies the abolition of the prohibition against the eating of foods declared as unclean (see Lev. 11). That this cannot be the apostle’s meaning is clear from the following observations:

- (1) The meat and drink are declared to be a shadow of Christ (Col. 2:17); that is, they point forward to Christ’s sacrifice and ministry. The ceremonial meal and drink offerings clearly belong in this category, but the prohibition against unclean foods does not.
- (2) The prohibition not to eat certain meats antedates the ceremonial law (see on Gen. 7:2). Hence, certain animals are to be viewed as unclean for reasons other than ceremonial. The indulgence of the appetite by eating impure foods frustrates the perfect designs of the Creator (see PP 308; 2T 70). The apostle is not giving permission to the Colossian Christians to eat and drink what they want, disregarding all criticism. What he is saying is that Christians are no longer obliged to carry out the requirements of the ceremonial law. These meal and drink offerings have met their fulfillment in Christ.

Holyday. The ceremonial ordinances contain commandments for the observance of various holy days—the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles (see Lev. 23).

New moon. The first day of each month, or new moon day (see Num. 10:10; 28:11; cf. 1 Sam. 20:5; Isa. 66:23).

Sabbath days. Gr. *sabbata*. This may represent either a genuine plural of the Gr. *sabbaton* or a transliteration of the Aramaic *shabbata*, a singular form. Hence *sabbata*, though grammatically plural in form, may and often does represent a singular (Matt. 28:1; etc.). Either form may be adopted here, for the interpretation of the passage does not depend upon whether the reading is “sabbath days,” or “a sabbath.” The type of sabbath under consideration is shown by the phrase “which are a shadow of things to come” (Col. 2:17). The weekly Sabbath is a memorial of an event at the beginning of earth’s history (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 20:8–11; PP 48). Hence, the “sabbath days” Paul declares to be shadows pointing to Christ cannot refer to the weekly Sabbath designated by the fourth commandment, but must indicate the ceremonial rest days that reach their

realization in Christ and His kingdom (see Lev. 23:6–8, 15, 16, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 37, 38).

17. Which are a shadow. This phrase is the key to the understanding of v. 16. All the items the apostle lists in v. 16 are “shadows,” or types, symbolizing the reality that is Christ. A shadow has no substance; it is cast by something substantial. Compare the use of the word “shadow” in Heb. 8:5 and 10:1. The Jewish ceremonies were shadows cast by heavenly realities. Christ’s life, ministry, and kingdom are the reality. The portrayal of this in the ceremonial law was only the shadow.

On this passage Albert Barnes, Presbyterian commentator, well observes: “There is no evidence from this passage that he [Paul] would teach that there was no obligation to observe *any* holy time, for there is not the slightest reason to believe that he meant to teach that one of the ten commandments had ceased to be binding on mankind. ... He had his eye on the great number of days which were observed by the Hebrews as festivals, as a part of their ceremonial and typical law, and not to the *moral* law, or the ten commandments. No part of the moral law—no one of the ten commandments could be spoken of as ‘a *shadow* of good things to come.’ These commandments are, from the nature of moral law, of perpetual and universal application.”

Body is of Christ. In contrast with the shadow, Jesus is the fullness of reality. It is to Him that every type points, and in Him that every symbol reaches its fullness. In finding Him, Christians turn their backs upon the typical, shadowy outlines, walking now in the fullness of the divine Presence.

In these verses Paul has completely removed the ground from beneath the feet of the Judaizing false teachers. They advocated a return to Judaic ceremonial requirements. The apostle meets their arguments by asserting that the shadows have served their function now that Christ, the reality, has come. In all this argument Paul is in no way minimizing the claims of the Decalogue or of the seventh-day Sabbath. The moral law is eternal and perfect (see on Rom. 14:1; Eph. 2:15).

18. Beguile ... of ... reward. Gr. *katabrabeuō*, “to render adverse judgments against,” “to decide against,” “to condemn.” There is a possible reference to the figure of an umpire disqualifying a contestant, since *brabeus* means “umpire.” The apostle now moves to another source of danger faced by the Colossian believers. He proceeds to handle the peculiar problems resulting from the false teachings advocated among them (see p. 184).

Voluntary humility. The artificial humility practiced to increase merit, self-imposed abasement resulting in unnecessary and unworthy asceticism—these are the results of pride. They are performed to win merit by personal, human effort. In practice they deny the righteousness of Christ, leaving no room for its operation in the human heart through faith. Compare 1T 297.

Worshipping of angels. These false teachers apparently accepted the guidance of angels, whom they considered to be lower emanations of God. They dwelt upon the weakness of man and his inferiority to and distance from the great and eternal God. This viewpoint was probably an extension of the voluntary humility they advocated. If man’s body was utterly worthless, then he could not approach God; he needed intermediaries. So these they worshiped as being superior to man and, in a sense, extensions of the Deity. Paul warns the Colossians against accepting this philosophy. It runs contrary to the teaching of Christ. Jesus, citing Deut. 6:13, declared, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). Heavenly angels prohibit adoration of themselves (see Rev. 22:9).

Intruding. Gr. *embateuō*, literally, “to step upon,” “to stand upon”; also “to enter upon,” as to invade a country; figuratively, “to investigate,” “to pry into.” *Embateuō* was used as a technical term in the terminology of the mystery religions, as shown in several inscriptions from Asia Minor dated about the 2d century after Christ. The term was thus probably common on the lips of the false teachers, and may have been used for initiation into the mysteries of the cult, in which case its meaning would be “to initiate.”

Things ... not seen. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the omission of the negative, thus reading “things ... seen,” meaning, probably, “visions.” Compare the RSV translation of this phrase, “taking his stand on visions.” If the translation “to initiate” is adopted for *embateuō* (see above on “intruding”), the passage may be translated, “which they have seen while being initiated.”

Vainly puffed up. This indicates a state of self-glorification and self-satisfaction.

Fleshly mind. That is, a mind controlled by the flesh in contrast with a mind controlled by the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1–13).

19. Head. That is, Christ (cf. on Eph. 4:15, 16). The ultimate of the philosophy such as the false teachers at Colossae taught was a denial of Christ.

Joints and bands. As the members of the physical body are held together by means of joints and sinews, all of which are part of the body, so the members of the Christian church, the mystic body of Christ, should be held together. The mystic body receives its strength and is held together by a personal union with the Lord Jesus Himself. Nothing, not even angels, should come between us and our Saviour.

Nourishment ministered. Gr. *epichorēgeō*, “to supply,” “to provide,” “to support.” The phrase may be translated, “the whole body, supported and knit together through joints and ligaments.”

Knit together. Compare Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:2. The Greek verb form indicates a continuing, developing process.

Increase of God. The mysterious force that brings about growth is the power of God Himself. Without this mighty principle of life, growth would be impossible. The really harmonious character can develop only as divine power unites with human effort. This is the practical outworking of righteousness by faith.

20. If ye be dead with Christ. Literally, “if you died with Christ” (see on Rom. 6:5–8).

Rudiments of the world. Here Paul is using the expression with special reference to the philosophy of the false teachers at Colossae (see on v. 8). In a more general way the “rudiments of the world” may be understood as the elementary things upon which the world depends for its life, the ABC of its structure. “World” is placed in contrast with heaven, and means the age in which we live, with its drives and interests. A man who is alive to the world, who is living according to the ways of the world and its philosophy, is dead to the things of God. The opposite is equally true: He who is “dead with Christ” and now lives by the principles of the kingdom of heaven, has turned his back forever upon the basic rudiments of this world, and is alive unto God.

Why, as though living. In substance Paul asks the Colossians: “Why, having relinquished false philosophy and the ambitions and fundamentals of this world through having died with Christ, are you living as though still bound by these things?”

Are ye subject to ordinances? Literally, “are you continuing to submit yourselves to decrees?” such as the obsolete ordinances of Judaism (see on v. 16). There may be a reference also to ascetic restrictions and decrees derived from cult sources. The false philosophy at Colossae contained both Judaic and pagan elements (see p. 184). “Now,” Paul says, “why, since you are not obliged to keep these ordinances, are you still concerned with them?”

21. Touch not. Or, “handle not.” The Mosaic ritual was full of prohibitions against touching leprosy, unclean issues, dead bodies, and other unhallowed things (Lev. 12–15; Num. 19:11–22). The lesson taught by these prohibitions was that the true follower of God would keep himself clean and pure from every contamination, moral and physical, that he might glorify his God. The false teachers probably added other taboos.

Taste not. The reference is doubtless to various dietary restrictions largely man made (see v. 8), such as those mentioned in 1 Tim. 4:3–5. See on Col. 2:16 for evidence that Paul is not removing restriction from the use of foods hygienically unclean. The false teachers at Colossae probably urged many taboos in the matter of diet.

Handle not. Or, “touch not.” The Greek verb is practically synonymous with that translated “touch” in this verse. Some commentators suggest the first should be translated “handle” and the last “touch.” The reference is to the various taboos the false teachers urged upon the Colossian Christians, some Judaic in origin and others drawn from Eastern philosophies.

22. All are to perish. That is, the things prohibited all perish. They are thus temporary in nature and of no lasting spiritual or moral value.

Of men. The decrees and taboos of the false teachers, even though to some extent similar to the requirements of the Jewish ceremonial system, were all only human requirements. God did not impose these upon men. The death of Christ had put an end to the ceremonial law, and what was beyond this God had never required.

23. Shew of wisdom. Or, “appearance of wisdom” (RSV). Paul is warning against being deceived and misled by appearances.

Will worship. Or, “self-made religion.” The basis of all man-made diligence in ceremonies is “will worship.” Man relies upon himself; he reveres the personal efforts he puts forth to gain favor with God. In the vigilance he imposes upon himself, in the spiritual tortures self-inflicted, in rituals self-designed in the form of worship contrived by man, his own will and prowess are the factors exalted. In contrast, the Christian philosophy puts human will in an entirely different place. Man’s will should be used only, and constantly, in making the choice for Christ. Christ is then paramount in the human soul, and man no longer exercises his will independently (see on Gal. 2:20). His daily prayer of consecration is the same as was the prayer of his Saviour, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Humility. Or, “lowliness.” Paul is here referring to mock humility such as that displayed by the Pharisees and ascetics who were actually guilty of the pride of exhibitionism. Such persons were inordinately proud of their humility, thus proving they possessed none of the genuine quality. Thus it was with the heretical teachers at Colossae.

Neglecting. Literally, “not sparing.” The religious extremists of Colossae apparently looked upon the body as being of itself sinful. Their severity with the body evidently was extreme, and out of harmony with the Christian teaching that the body is the “temple of

the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 6:19), and contrary to the instruction to present the body a living sacrifice (see on Rom. 12:1).

Honour. Gr. *timē*, “price,” “value,” “honor.” The translation “value” is adopted in the interpretation given below.

To. Gr. *pros*, which in some contexts means “against,” as probably here (cf. Eph. 6:11, 12). For the meaning of the passage when *pros* is thus translated see below under “satisfying of the flesh.”

Satisfying of the flesh. Literally, “over-indulgence of the flesh.” The last part of this verse has been declared to be the most difficult in the entire epistle. One can only conjecture as to its meaning. A common interpretation is that the carrying out of all these human laws and speculations is of no value against overindulgence of the flesh. The only thing that will achieve this is complete surrender of the heart to Christ and the death of the will to the appeals of the world.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

- 1–4AA 473
- 2–4GW 305; 8T 295
- 3 COL 22, 115; DA 465; Ed 13; FE 177, 181; MB 34; ML 360; SC 17, 109; 2T 510; 5T 703
- 4 AA 474
- 6 SC 52, 69
- 6, 7 FE 303
- 6–8CH 584; EW 25
- 6–10AA 473; GW 305; 8T 295
- 7 AA 175; FE 231, 304
- 8 GW 16; 1T 297
- 8–107T 204
- 9 COL 115; Ev 231, 614; MB 34, 78; PK 597
- 9, 10 DA 181; FE 306; GW 57; MYP 55; 8T 334
- 10 CH 369, 593; CT 18, 491; Ed 257; FE 303, 376, 429, 446; GW 113; MB 21; ML 15, 276, 340; MM 41, 219; 6T 167; 7T 248
- 14 AA 194; EW 33; PP 365
- 15, 17 DA 165
- 17–196T 235
- 18 FE 304; 1T 297, 299
- 19 1T 300
- 21 Te 289; 3T 561; 5T 360
- 23 2T 612

CHAPTER 3

1 *He sheweth where we should seek Christ. 5 He exhorteth to mortification, 10 to put off the old man, and to put on Christ, 12 exhorting to charity, humility, and other several duties.*

1. If. There is no doubt implied in the Greek. The phrase thus introduced has an argumentative conditional force. The condition is assumed as being true.

Risen with Christ. Paul’s words might be paraphrased, “Since then you have been raised with Christ.” The “then” takes us back to ch. 2:20, and still further back to vs. 12,

13. Paul is stressing the glorious position and privileges that the believer has in his Saviour. The poor expedient of a legalistic, or mechanical, religion, full of routines and taboos, by contrast with vital Christianity, is needless and futile.

Seek. That is, make a habit of seeking, as the Greek implies (cf. Matt. 6:33).

Those things. The drive of the will, vitalized by the power of Jesus, should be directed to heavenly things. Man's objectives and efforts, turned away from the rudiments of the world, should be centered in heavenly realities.

Which are above. In contrast with the "rudiments of the world" (ch. 2:20).

Sitteth. This word suggests the assumption of a permanent office (cf. Mark 14:62). Christ's throne is settled in the heavens.

Right hand of God. This is a position of authority and honor (see on Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:34). It figuratively describes the union of Christ with the Father in the government of the universe (see on Phil. 2:5–8; cf. on Eph. 1:20).

2. Set your affection on. Literally, "continually think of," or "continually pay attention to."

Things above. That is, things in heaven (cf. on v. 1). Where a man's treasure is, there his heart will be (Matt. 6:21).

The earth. This expression is in contrast with "heaven," implied in "above." Whereas heavenly things pertain to Christ and eternal life, earthly things have to do with the program set up by Satan in rebellion against God, and from them the Christian turns, for they are not his goal.

3. For ye are dead. Literally, "For you died," that is, symbolically, in baptism (see on Rom. 6:2–4). Death precedes the new life. There is a clear distinction between the unregenerate and the regenerate nature. This spiritual death of which Paul speaks is the result of the complete surrender of the human will to God through faith in Christ.

Hide with Christ. The form of the Greek verb indicates that the act of hiding was complete and that its effect continues on to the present. The life is still hidden. The life here spoken of is that which the believer receives when he accepts Christ. Jesus said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). It is his now, and will be translated into glorious immortality at the second coming of Christ (see on John 8:51).

4. Christ ... our life. Compare on John 1:4. Not only is Jesus the author of the Christian life and the ultimate objective of human endeavors; He is also the daily source of strength and guidance to the sons and daughters of God, and the guarantee of future immortal life. The Christian's life is indivisible from Christ.

Shall appear. Gr. *phaneroō*, "to make visible," "to make manifest." When used of the second advent of Christ, *phaneroō* emphasizes the fact that Jesus, now hidden from mortal sight, will at His advent be revealed to men (cf. Rev. 1:7). *Phaneroō* is used of the second advent also in 1 Peter 5:4; 1 John 3:2.

Appear ... in glory. Or, "manifested ... in glory." *Phaneroō* is here used also of the saints (see above on "shall appear"), who will be manifested "in glory," with bodies "fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). "When he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). The prayer of Christ, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (John 17:24), will then be fulfilled. Those who have been members of Christ's kingdom of grace on earth will then be citizens of the kingdom of glory.

5. Mortify. Literally, “put to death” (see on Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:24).

Therefore. That is, in view of what the apostle has just said (vs. 2–4).

Your members. That is, the organs and faculties of the body, here probably to be understood as those pertaining to the old man, as indicated by the phrase “which are upon the earth.” The old man, with his members employed as instruments of unrighteousness, must die.

Fornication. Gr. *porneia*, a general term for illicit sexual relationships of all kinds (cf. Eph. 5:3).

Uncleanness. Or, “impurity,” “moral defilement.”

Inordinate affection. Gr. *pathos*, “passion,” “passionate desire,” used in an evil sense in the NT. In Rom. 1:26 *pathos* is used with *atimia*, “dishonor,” in the expression “vile affections.”

Concupiscence. Gr. *epithumia*, “desire” (see on Rom. 7:7).

Covetousness. Gr. *pleonexia*, “the desire to have more.” Compare the use of the word in Rom. 1:29; 2 Cor. 9:5; Eph. 4:19; 5:3; etc. Covetousness is an antisocial vice, a self-assertive longing for or grasping of what is the right or possession of another.

Which is idolatry. The substitution of anything in the heart in the place of God is idolatry (cf. on Gal. 5:20).

6. The wrath of God. See on Rom. 1:18.

Children of disobedience. Textual evidence is divided (cf. p. 10) between retaining and omitting the phrase “on the children of disobedience.” For the expression “children of disobedience” see on Eph. 2:2.

7. Walked. Gr. *peripateō*, “to conduct oneself” (see on Eph. 2:2, 10).

Some time. Or, “formerly.”

8. But now. In contrast with “some time” (v. 7).

Put off. Gr. *apothēmi*, “to put off from oneself” as a garment (Acts 7:58); metaphorically, “to put off,” “to lay aside” (cf. on Rom. 13:12). The verb is an imperative in the Greek. Paul is commanding the Colossians once and for all by an act of will to put away from themselves all that he is about to name.

Anger. Gr. *orgē*, the word used in v. 6 for the “wrath of God.” See on Rom. 2:8; cf. on Eph. 4:26, 31.

Wrath. Gr. *thumos* (see on Rom. 2:8).

Malice. Gr. *kakia* (see on Rom. 1:29).

Blasphemy. Gr. *blasphēmia*, “slander,” “railing speech,” directed against either men or God (see Mark 2:7; 7:22; cf. on Rev. 13:1).

Filthy communication. Gr. *aischrologia*, “shameful speaking.” This is the only use in the NT of this word. It suggests not only filthy talking but also foulmouthed abuse. Compare on Eph. 4:29.

Out of your mouth. One who speaks “filthy communications” is but laying bare the foulness of his soul (see Matt. 15:11–18). On the contrary, he who bridles his tongue and

offends not in word, “the same is a perfect man” (James 3:2). The Christian must set a watch upon his lips (Ps. 141:3).

Lie not. See on Eph. 4:25.

Put off. Gr. *apekduomai* (see on ch. 2:15). The figure is that of laying aside clothing.

Old man. See on Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; cf. on John 3:3, 5.

His deeds. Such practices as the apostle has enumerated in vs. 5, 8, 9.

Put on. This expression indicates the reversal of the process of taking off garments.

New man. See on Eph. 4:24; cf. DA 176; 9T 20, 23.

Which is renewed. Rather, “which is being renewed,” the form of the Greek word indicating a continuous process. The word translated “renewed” stresses newness in quality. The picture is one of a gradual development into the full knowledge of God. Growth is the product and the evidence of life, both in nature and in the spiritual life. The power of the Life-giver is the only agency by which growth can be maintained.

Knowledge. Gr. *epignōsis*, “full, complete, and thorough knowledge.” Compare chs. 1:9, 10; 2:2 (“acknowledgement”). This knowledge is the experimental realization and understanding of the principles of heaven, and it is the purpose toward which the “renewing” tends.

After the image. That is, according to the image. See on Rom. 8:29.

That created him. That is, that created the new man. As Christ is the express image of His Father (Heb. 1:3), so the Christian is to grow “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (see on Eph. 4:13).

11. Greek nor Jew. In the new order of Christian living all national distinctions are removed (see on Rom. 10:12; Gal. 3:28; cf. on Rom. 1:6). Throughout his epistles Paul repeats this truth.

Circumcision nor uncircumcision. See on Rom. 2:25–29; Gal. 5:6.

Barbarian. See on Acts 28:2; Rom. 1:14.

Scythian. A synonym for the wildest of barbarians.

Bond nor free. Or, “slave nor free.” Here the apostle speaks of social distinctions. Paul is declaring that in the sphere of Christ, and in the process of permitting the creative energy of God to bring about a new creature, no national, religious, racial, or social barriers exist. “The life of Christ established a religion in which there is no caste, a religion by which Jew and Gentile, free and bond, are linked in a common brotherhood, equal before God” (9T 191).

Christ is all, and in all. Jesus Christ is here depicted as the goal for ultimate realization. He is “the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23). Since His character is in all His people, how can there be any distinction among them? There can be no rivalry or enmity between members of the body of Christ. Jesus is the common heritage of His saints, their ideal, their goal in character building. He is also the means by which this brotherhood of victors is attained.

12. Put on therefore. Since this is so, Paul stresses the need for a voluntary act by which the Christian takes upon himself the likeness of Christ and His character. See on v. 10.

Elect of God. These are the subjects of the kingdom of heaven. All who have accepted Christ, irrespective of national, religious, racial, and social distinctions, are the elect of God. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. See TM 422; see on Rom. 8:33; cf. PP 207, 208.

Holy. Those who have been set aside, who are separate from the world, and who are devoted to the service of God (see on Rom. 1:7). Holiness is the manifestation of a life in perfect agreement with God. “As God is holy in His sphere, so fallen man, through faith in Christ, is to be holy in his sphere” (AA 559).

Beloved. That is, beloved by God.

Bowels. Gr. *splagchna*, “the inward parts,” metaphorically, the seat of the emotions.

Mercies. Gr. *oiktirmoi*, “tenderest compassions” (see on Rom. 12:1). A heart of compassion is a distinguishing feature of true Christianity.

Kindness. Gr. *chrēstotēs*, “goodness,” “gentleness,” “excellence” (see Rom. 3:12; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 2:7). This word expresses love in action (1 Cor. 13:4). It is descriptive of gentle, gracious, kindly consideration, both in disposition and action, toward the needs of one’s neighbor.

Humbleness of mind. Gr. *tapeinophrosunē* (see on Acts 20:19; Eph. 4:2). Compare the use of the word in Phil. 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5. In Col. 2:18, 23 the word describes false humility. The child of God “should labor constantly for humbleness of mind and that meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price” (2 T the 288).

Meekness. Meekness is the absence of self-justification, the opposite of self-assertion. It is a mild and kindly equanimity. Our Saviour, during His hours of bitterest trial, was the perfect example of true meekness (see DA 734). This pattern the true Christian must strive to emulate in his daily life (see DA 354). See on Matt. 5:5; cf. Gal. 5:23.

Longsuffering. Gr. *makrothumia*, “patience,” “patient endurance.” Compare the use of the related verb, *makrothumeō*, in 1 Cor. 13:4; James 5:7. *Makrothumia* depicts utmost restraint, long-protracted refusal of the soul to yield to any passion, particularly anger. Compare on 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 1:11.

13. Forbearing one another. Or, “tolerating each other.”

Forgiving one another. In our relationships with fellow Christians, not only should there be habitual outward self-restraint or forbearance in overt words or acts, there should also be the habit of inwardly passing over the faults, wrongs, or weaknesses of others. This is true forgiveness (cf. Mark 11:25; Eph. 4:32).

Quarrel. Gr. *mompḗ*, “complaint,” “cause for complaint,” “blame.” This word is not used elsewhere in the NT.

Christ. Textual evidence is divided (cf. p. 10) between this and the reading “the Lord.” The great standard of man’s forgiveness of man is God’s forgiveness of the human family (cf. Eph. 4:32; MB 113, 114; 5T 170).

14. Charity. Gr. *agapē*. See on Matt. 5:43; 1 Cor. 13:1. That which should bind together all other qualities is love. No matter how high may be the profession of the nominal Christian, if his soul is not filled with love for God and for his fellow men, he is not a true disciple of Christ (see on 1 Cor. 13:1–3).

Bond. Gr. *sundesmos*, “that which binds together,” “a bond.” In ch. 2:19 *sundesmos* is used of the ligaments of the body. Love binds together into a perfect unity the qualities of the individual Christian and the various members of the mystic body of Christ.

Perfectness. Or, “maturity.” Each in his own sphere is to attain to the highest development. “First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn” (Mark 4:28). As God is perfect in His sphere, so must the Christian be in his (see Matt. 5:48; COL 65; AA 531).

15. God. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading “Christ.” The peace of Christ is here described, not as a static virtue, but as an active power. It enables man to live in tranquility, undisturbed and trusting, amid the hardest circumstances of life. Christ, the source of this peace, becomes captain of the soul and serenely pilots the ship of life into a safe harbor (see John 14:27; Eph. 2:14; Phil. 4:7).

Rule. Gr. *brabeuō*, literally, “to be the umpire,” hence, “to award the prize” (the related noun, *brabeion*, “prize,” occurs in 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:14), “to pronounce decisions,” “to arbitrate.” From the heart come decisions and policies that affect not only the individual but also the church and society. Paul here is telling the Colossian Christians to enthrone the peace that comes from Christ as the “umpire” of their lives.

Are called. Rather, “were called.” This peace of Christ enjoyed by the true believers is an essential part of the purpose of God through the gospel. It is impossible to envisage a Christian at war with his God and with his brethren.

In one body. The mystic body of Christ is the organized group of believers who have as their goal the establishment of the divine purposes (see Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:16; 4:4). Since all true Christians are part of the body of Christ, there can be no disagreements without injury to every member, thus making the entire body sick. God desires that all should be cooperative, united in love and service.

Be ye thankful. It is a Christian duty to be thankful. Gratitude to God may be likened to the soil in which the tender plant of peace flourishes (see Phil. 4:6, 7). Thankfulness is acknowledgment that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift and the guide of the Christian in every step of life’s journey. Since God works all things together for the good of those who love Him (see on Rom. 8:28), and since nothing is hidden from the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, what need is there to fear? The Christian who today lifts his voice in praise, will one day join the hallelujah chorus of redeemed men and unfallen angels.

16. The word of Christ. This may be understood as either the message that comes from Christ or the gospel that treats of Him. Compare the phrases “word of the Lord” (2 Thess. 3:1), “my word” (John 5:24).

Dwell in you. Or, “make its home in you.”

Richly. This word emphasizes the overflowing abundance that brings enrichment to the soul. The gospel story on their lips, within their hearts, guiding their thoughts and actions, would enrich the Colossians in things of the kingdom of heaven.

In all wisdom. This may be connected either with the foregoing, as in the KJV, or with what follows—“in all wisdom teaching and admonishing. ...”

Teaching. This is the imparting of knowledge. Patiently and systematically, beginning with the simple and progressing into the profound, he who has the word of Christ dwelling in his heart must teach its principles to others, all the while exemplifying them in his own life. Compare on 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11.

Admonishing. Gr. *noutheteō* (see on ch. 1:28).

Psalms. Gr. *psalmoi*, one of the OT psalms, or a hymn of praise possibly sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments. The related word, *psallō*, often means to play an instrument (see 1 Sam. 16:16, LXX), though it may mean simply “to sing praises.”

Hymns. Gr. *hymnoi*, from which our word “hymns” is derived. By these the apostle may have designated songs distinctively Christian in sentiment.

Spiritual songs. That is, sacred songs.

Grace. Gr. *charis* (see on Rom. 3:24). Many scholars think that the meaning “thankfulness” applies here. Others think that the reference is to divine grace. See on Eph. 5:20.

In your hearts. The melody of the lips should first fill the soul. Only then will it be effective in moving others. As the heart senses the significance of what is being sung, the voice will portray its inner qualities.

To the Lord. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading “to God.” The apostle has gathered into this verse the fullness of the ministry of one whose heart is enriched by the abiding presence of the word of Christ. By word and song he teaches and admonishes his brother and praises and extols his God.

17. Word or deed. These are the two great outlets of human life and conduct. Nothing unworthy of Christ is to be done by His children; nothing unworthy is to be said.

In the name. That is, in the spirit and character of one who truly serves Christ, and with reference to Christ. The Christian should ever bear in mind that day by day he is building a character for eternity. He should constantly place himself under God’s control. He must be guarded in all that he says and does. He must bear in mind that in his life “religion is not merely one influence among others; it is to be an influence dominating all others” (CT 489).

Giving thanks. As an accompaniment of all that the Christian thinks and does there should be praise (cf. Eph. 5:4, 20; 1 Thess. 5:18). Repeatedly the apostle has emphasized a need for expressing our gratitude and thanks to God (see Col. 1:12; 2:7; 3:15; 4:2).

And the Father. Rather, “even the Father.” The Christian’s object of praise is God, who is his Father. Jesus is the agent through whom we extend our gratitude to the Father.

18. Wives, submit yourselves. See on Eph. 5:22.

Own. Textual evidence attests (cf. p. 10) the omission of this word, which probably came in from the parallel text, Eph. 5:22.

Fit. Or, “proper,” “suitable.”

In the Lord. See on Eph. 1:4.

19. Love your wives. See on Eph. 5:25.

20. Children, obey your parents. See on Eph. 6:1.

In all things. This must not be construed as including any requirement contrary to God’s will. A sinful command lays no obligation on the child. Paul is addressing Christian families, hence there is no need for the qualification.

Unto the Lord. Textual evidence attests (cf. p. 10) the reading “in the Lord,” paralleling v. 18. The sphere of obedience is the Lord, and to please Him should be the child’s supreme objective. While he is carrying out the rules of his parents he is pleasing God.

21. Provoke ... to anger. Gr. *erethizō*, “to stir up,” either in a good sense, as in 2 Cor. 9:2, or in an evil sense, as here. By continual nagging and complaining, finding fault and censuring, the feelings of children can be roused in revulsion against all forms of discipline.

Discouraged. Gr. *athumoō*, “to lose heart,” “to become spiritless or despondent.” The word occurs only here in the NT. Under continual provocation the young person may lose heart in his attempts to attain victory over his weaknesses, and give up the Christian life altogether. His father’s objectives may have been right, but his unfortunate method of attempting to achieve perfection in his child produces a disastrous result. See Eph. 6:4.0

22. Servants, obey. See on Eph. 6:5.

Eyeservice, as menpleasers. The motive for service should not be merely to satisfy a human standard, to work while the overseer is looking on and to give the minimum in effort. Such servants may look upon themselves as merely pleasing their human masters, but this is unworthy as a motive for Christians. See on Eph. 6:6.

Singleness. Gr. *haplotēs*, “simplicity,” “sincerity” (see on Rom. 12:8). This is the exact opposite of eyeservice. One who looks only to please his master, and that only while the master is watching, and who at other times does nothing, is a hypocrite. See on Eph. 6:5.

Fearing God. Or, “reverencing God.” He is the great master. His standards are those that should impel Christians in whatever walk they may be to act as recognizing the Lord to be the One to whom they are finally accountable.

23. Heartily. Literally, “out of [your] soul” (see on Eph. 6:6; cf. Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:30).

To the Lord. See on Eph. 6:7.

24. Ye shall receive. See on Eph. 6:8.

Reward of the inheritance. That is, the reward which is the inheritance. Since there is no difference, as far as the kingdom of God is concerned, between the bond and the free (see on v. 11), Paul now extends that idea into declaring that the slave, too, may have the reward of the inheritance.

For. Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the omission of this word.

Ye serve. With the omission of “for” (see above) this may be rendered as an imperative, “serve ye.” Either translation can be fitted into the context. It is true that slaves must take orders from their earthly masters, but their standards for service and ultimate purpose should be to please Christ above.

25. He that doeth wrong. Some understand this to apply to the slave who does not render his full measure of service; others, to the master who mistreats his slave; still others regard the statement as general. Against the view that it is the slave who is admonished is the observation that the statement “there is no respect of persons” is generally if not always applied to one of higher rank. A comparison with Eph. 6:9 suggests that the second view is probably correct.

Shall receive. Gr. *komizō*, “to receive [wages],” “to receive [a recompense].” Compare the use of the word in 2 Cor. 5:10. Paul is doubtless referring to the final judgment when the oppressive master or the unfaithful slave will receive recompense for their unrighteous conduct.

No respect of persons. Literally, “no receiving of face” (see on Eph. 6:9; cf. on Rom. 2:11).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

- 1 MB 91; MYP 317; 1T 705; 6T 147
1, 2 CS 136; 5T 536
1–3AA 476; 2T 177; 6T 99
1–4CT 258; 1T 508
1–6MM 147
2 CT 234; ML 105, 359; MYP 104; 1T 279; 2T 184, 675, 690
2, 3 CS 158; 2T 690
3 AA 512, 594; CH 342; CT 152; DA 224, 527; Ev 447, 644; FE 289; GW 373; MB 16, 26; MH 136; ML 273, 277, 318; MM 144; PP 450; SL 13; SR 319; Te 113; TM 143; 2T 158, 425; 4T 614; 5T 514, 573; 6T 51, 121, 146; 7T 194; 9T 62, 106
3, 4 DA 787; MM 7; MYP 84; TM 512; 1T 550; 2T 145; 4T 357
5 AA 447; COL 261; CS 26, 84, 223; PP 439, 496; 3T 130, 201, 250, 387, 513; 4T 476; 5T 337
7, 8 AA 477
8 ML 334
10 MH 425
11 AA 246, 390; 4T 401
12 AH 114; 1T 165; 2T 332; 7T 46
12–15AA 477; 4T 243, 257; 5T 169
12–17SL 87; 6T 99
14–171T 508
15 MH 253; 5T 75; 8T 191; 9T 136
17 CT 489; MM 42; 5T 170
18, 19 AH 116
20 1T 497
21 CG 279
22–24MYP 230
23 MB 99; ML 219; SC 83; 4T 572; 5T 459, 726; 9T 221
23, 24 CG 294; Ed 226; 7T 180
24 COL 346

CHAPTER 4

1 *He exhorteth them to be fervent in prayer, 5 to walk wisely toward them that are not yet come to the true knowledge of Christ. 10 He saluteth them, and wisheth them all prosperity.*

I. Masters. See on Eph. 6:9.

Give. Gr. *parechō*, “to hold out to,” “to offer,” “to supply,” here in a form that would imply “on your part.”

Servants. Gr. *douloi* (see on Rom. 1:1; Eph. 6:9).

That which is just. The master must not act from mere caprice. As a human being the slave has inalienable rights. These rights should be respected and his basic needs supplied.

Equal. Gr. *isotēs*, “equity,” “fairness,” “impartial treatment” (see Lev. 25:39–43; Deut. 15:12–14; see on Gal. 3:28; Eph. 6:9).

Ye also have a Master. The master is but the steward of Christ. The wealth he has and his ability to manage affairs were given to him by his Lord in heaven. This philosophy is but the extension of the golden rule into the relationship of the master and his slaves. Paul is saying in effect, “Treat your slaves as you would wish your Master in heaven to treat you.” Compare Matt. 23:8; Eph. 6:9.

2. Continue. Gr. *proskartereō* (see on Rom. 12:12). Compare on Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17.

Watch. The apostle’s admonition stresses the need for continual alertness in the act of prayer. Constantly we are to be on guard lest the adversary distract us, and lest we lose our alertness and become weary.

With thanksgiving. Or, “in thanksgiving.” Compare on Eph. 6:18. see on 1 Thess. 5:18. Prayer and watchfulness should always be in the setting of gratitude to God. Though we are in daily need of help and guidance, we nevertheless have much for which we should be ever thankful.

3. Praying ... for us. see on Eph. 6:19. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul includes his fellow laborers in his request for intercessory prayer.

Door of utterance. Literally, “door of the word,” that is, a door for the word, a door for preaching. Compare the figure of a door in Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12. Opportunities to preach the gospel are looked upon as doors flung wide for the preacher to pass through with the good news. Paul desires that he might be liberated, for the preaching of the gospel is hindered by his captivity. He knows that only God can bring this about, and so he would have the Colossians believers importune Heaven that the Lord might so work. Such prayer would unite the Colossian believers in the great interests of the gospel and incite them to greater activity.

Mystery of Christ. see on Rom. 11:25; cf. Eph. 3:3–6. The mystery of Christ is the mystery that Christ has revealed. The far-reaching purposes of God are unknown to man apart from the revelation of Christ.

Bonds. It was because Paul preached the mystery of Christ that he was in bonds. His arrest in Jerusalem was a direct result of the hostility of the Jews toward the message he bore.

4. Make it manifest. Or, “reveal it,” that is, the mystery. The great ambition of every preacher is to reveal this truth of the gospel clearly.

As I ought to speak. Or, “as it is necessary for me to speak.” God had designed that Paul should preach the gospel without hindrance in lands far and near. His bonds prevented the carrying out of this commission (see 1 Thess. 2:18).

5. Walk. Gr. *peripateō*, “to conduct one-self” (see on Eph. 2:2). The complete manner of life of the Christian, including all his relationships toward God and man, is included in this word.

Wisdom. That is, practical Christian wisdom (cf. on Prov. 1:2, 3).

Them that are without. That is, non-Christians. Compare 1 Cor. 5:12; 1 Thess. 4:12. The ambition of the true disciple should be to make disciples of “them that are without.” The most significant way to accomplish this is by the example of a virtuous Christian life. Against this there is no argument.

Redeeming the time. Literally, “buying up for yourselves the opportune time” (see on Eph. 5:16).

6. Speech. Hand in hand with the Christian’s manner of life go the words he speaks. Especially is this true in his contacts with those who “are without” (v. 5). Not only the words he speaks, but the way he says them, and even the tone of his voice, make an impression for good or ill on those whom he meets. Hence his discourse and conversation should be well guarded.

Grace. Gr. *charis* (see on Rom. 3:24). Here the word may be defined as “graciousness,” “sweetness.” When Jesus spoke, those in His home-town synagogue were impressed by the “gracious words” (literally, “words of grace”) that fell from His lips (Luke 4:22). The words of the Christian should carry with them the power and influence of Heaven.

Seasoned with salt. Salt renders food palatable. Here it is that which makes speech attractive, stimulating, and agreeable to listen to. The opposite would be stale, insipid, or idle speech (see on Matt. 12:36). When the Christian opens his mouth, pleasant, helpful, edifying words should flow forth.

Answer every man. It is the responsibility of each Christian to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh ... a reason of the hope that is in” him (see on 1 Peter 3:15). Personal witnessing is an essential part of the Christian life. In order to witness effectively, it is essential that our words be of the nature here described.

7. All my state. Or, “all the matters pertaining to me” (cf. Phil. 1:12). Paul presumed that the Colossians would be interested in the details concerning his imprisonment.

Tychicus. See on Eph. 6:21.

Fellowservant. A title of honor, for it places Tychicus on a footing with Paul. This item concerning Tychicus is not mentioned in Eph. 6:21.

In the Lord. It was within the program and influence of Christ that his ministry was exercised. The Master’s will was the surrounding and pervading element that bound all His servants together. Tychicus was doubtless happy to be bound to such a Master, to fellowship with His servants, and to hasten on His errands.

8. Whom I have sent. Compare Eph. 6:22. Tychicus was the bearer of Paul’s letter to the Colossians and also the bearer of a personal message from Paul.

That he might know your estate. Textual evidence is divided (cf. p. 10) between this and “that ye might know our state,” or, “that you may know how we are” (RSV). This agrees with what Paul says in v. 7 and with the parallel statement in Eph. 6:21. Tychicus was to explain to the members how Paul was doing, to encourage them to continue in the Christian way, and perhaps to obtain financial help to sustain Paul in prison.

Comfort your hearts. see on Eph. 6:22.

9. Onesimus. A runaway slave from Colossae who had been converted in Rome through the labors of Paul (see on Philemon 10).

Faithful and beloved. Formerly Onesimus had been anything but trustworthy and reliable. Now his life has been completely changed.

One of you. Onesimus was from Colossae. As a Christian he now belonged to the brotherhood of believers (see on Gal. 3:28; cf. Philemon 10–12).

They shall make known. Paul entrusts to him, together with Tychicus, the message that is to be delivered officially, showing that Paul had full confidence in his conversion and integrity.

10. Aristarchus. A companion of Paul from Thessalonica (Acts 27:2). He had shared with the apostle the experiences connected with the tumult at Ephesus (Acts 19:29). When the apostolic delegation journeyed from Corinth to Jerusalem, Aristarchus probably carried the offering from Thessalonica to the mother church in Palestine (Acts 20:4). He also accompanied Paul at least part way on the apostle's journey as a prisoner from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 27:2). In Philemon 24 he is included among Paul's "fellowlabourers."

Fellowprisoner. Some have conjectured that Aristarchus had voluntarily decided to share the discomforts of Paul's prison life, to minister to his needs, a practice which some allege the Romans allowed.

Sister's son. Gr. *anepsios*, "cousin." The translation "sister's son" may reflect the Latin Vulgate rendering, *consobrinus*, which means specifically "sister's son," but also a relative in any degree. Or, the translators may have concluded that *anepsios* meant the same as the English word "nephew," which is derived from *anepsios* through the Latin *nepos*.

Difference of opinion over John Mark once separated Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36–40). After the split, Barnabas, Mark's cousin, took the lad under his care. "Under the blessing of God, and the wise training of Barnabas, he developed into a valuable worker" (AA 170). Paul happily acknowledged the great change and now accepted Mark as one of his "fellowlabourers" (Philemon 24; cf. 2 Tim. 4:11).

11. Jesus ... Justus. This is the only mention of this name in the Bible, although the name Justus appears in two other instances (Acts 1:23; 18:7).

Of the circumcision. That is, Jews. Here the term refers to Jewish Christians. The phrase should be connected with the following sentences—of the circumcision, only the three mentioned are his fellow laborers, and a comfort to him.

12. Epaphras ... one of you. Epaphras was a native of Colossae, who had labored there and possibly also at Laodicea and Hierapolis. He was Paul's informant regarding the situation in his home church (cf. ch. 1:7, 8). Evidently he was remaining at Rome longer than he had planned at first, in order to assist Paul in his ministry. He joined Paul in sending greetings.

Labouring fervently. Literally, "continually agonizing or striving" (cf. ch. 1:29). Remaining in Rome, Epaphras had not forgotten the believers back home. He wrestled on their behalf, that is, in intercessory prayer.

Perfect and complete. Or, "mature and completed." Textual evidence favors (cf. p. 10) the reading "mature and fully established." The Christian who by grace has reached the goal of each stage of his advancing knowledge and experience, is regarded by Heaven as perfect (see on Matt. 5:48).

In all the will of God. see on ch. 1:9. This embraces the entire scheme of Christ for the salvation of His people.

13. I bear him record. Or, "I am witnessing in respect to him."

Zeal. Gr. *zēlos*, "generous rivalry," "ardor in striving after something"; also "jealousy," "indignation." Important textual evidence may be cited (cf. p. 10) for the reading *ponos*, "labor," "anguish."

Laodicea ... Hierapolis. These two cities, one on each side of the Lycus River a few miles apart, had churches founded probably at nearly the same time as the one at Colossae, and doubtless Epaphras served them as well as the church at Colossae. Concerning Laodicea see pp. 100–102; see on Rev. 3:14.

14. Luke. For a biography of Luke see Vol. V, pp. 663, 664; cf. on Acts 16:10. The personal companionship of Luke was a never-failing source of comfort and strength.

Demas. Mentioned only here, in 2 Tim. 4:10, and in Philemon 24. Demas now apparently stood loyally, but later a change came. During his second imprisonment Paul lamented, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed” (2 Tim. 4:10).

15. Laodicea. See on v. 13. There was doubtless frequent fellowship among the believers of the three cities situated in close proximity in the Lycus Valley.

Nymphas. Nothing else is known about this person. Important textual evidence may be cited (cf. p. 10) for reading the name also as feminine, with “her.” There is some textual evidence also for the reading “their house.” The person in question was obviously full of zeal for the cause of God, generously providing his or her own commodious home as a meeting place for the believers of the little church at Laodicea.

16. Cause that it be read also. Such a custom must have been general by early Christians. History indicates that the NT writings were copied and recopied and that they had a wide circulation.

The epistle from Laodicea. This does not mean that the epistle was written “from Laodicea,” but that having been written to Laodicea, it should be carried over to Colossae “from Laodicea.” Thus it would be “from Laodicea” as far as the Colossian church was concerned. As to the identity of this epistle nothing definite is known. Many hold the theory that the letter to the Ephesians is the one to which allusion is here made. Paul wrote Ephesians at about the same time that he wrote Colossians, perhaps even on the same day. Both were entrusted to the same messenger, Tychicus (cf. Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7). But this is only a conjecture. For a discussion of the problem of the authorship of Ephesians see Vol. VI, pp. 993, 994.

17. Archippus. He is mentioned only here and in Philemon 2. In Philemon his name appears in close proximity to the names of Philemon and Apphia. Apphia has been regarded by commentators as Philemon’s wife. Possibly Archippus was their son. This would coincide with Paul’s statement here (see next comment). In Philemon, Paul calls Archippus his “fellowsoldier” and mentions the church in Philemon’s house, of which Archippus may have been an officer. Evidently, like Nymphas, Philemon had thrown his house open to the brethren as a meeting place, and Archippus was associated with him in ministry of some capacity.

Ministry. Gr. *diakonia* (see on Rom. 12:7). The word could refer to the office of deacon (see Rom. 12:7). It suggests service (Acts 12:25), and might include the functions of pastor, or elder. Archippus is warned to take heed continually, to put his utmost effort, his closest application, into his duties; to be wide awake in all his tasks.

Received in the Lord. Paul reminds Archippus that his service was entrusted to him by the Lord. As with the priests in the OT, so with the gospel minister, “no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God” (Heb. 5:4).

Fulfil it. That is, carry out its varied responsibilities.

18. Salutation by ... Paul. Apparently at this point Paul took the quill from the hand of his amanuensis and wrote his own farewell greeting (see on 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11). The expression shows his affection, and adds a final touch of genuineness and personal authority to his letter.

Remember my bonds. Paul doubtless mentioned these to arouse the sympathetic love and understanding of the Colossians. They would realize that he, though in chains in prison, was yet mindful of them. They would sense anew his affection for them and his intercession on their behalf.

Grace be with you. Compare 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22. For the meaning of the greeting see on Rom. 1:7.

Amen. Important textual evidence may be cited (cf. p. 10) for the omission of this word.

The postscript following v. 18 occurs in no ancient manuscript. It was not part of the original inspired record.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

2 CS 274; ML 16; SC 97

5 CM 47; COL 342; 3T 482

5, 6 2T 317

6 AH 435; COL 336; CT 443; CW 19; GW 122; MB 68; ML 114; 1T 648; 2T 317, 338; 4T 135, 400, 521

7–14AA 455

10 AA 440

10, 11 AA 170

14 AA 454; CH 498; Ev 554; MH 140; 6T 233

⁴Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Col 2:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.